

SHAKESPEARE

THE MAN AND HIS WORK

MORTON LUCE

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SHAKESPEARE
THE MAN AND HIS WORK



Shakespeare

The Man and His Work

Seven Essays

By

MORTON LUCE

Author of

"A Handbook to the Works of Shakespeare"
etc.



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P R E F A C E

WHEN the biographer turns scandal-monger, Art also is thrown from her pedestal. As it appears to me, some of our modern estimates of Shakespeare emphasise the animal features of the man at the expense of the moral and the spiritual, and there follows a somewhat lower estimate of his work. We used to believe that a great poet is one who feels great truths, and tells them ; according to Milton he is “inspired,” and according to Shakespeare himself his art is “heaven-bred ;” at any rate, it is the most spiritual of the arts, and the beauty of poetry at its highest comes very near to the beauty of goodness.¹

Again, we used to inquire as to a writer’s religious opinions, and respect them ; certainly in the case of a modern author we are mostly

¹ “Beauty is a kind of goodness.”—HUXLEY.

spared that trouble, for he is not supposed to have any. In the time of Shakespeare, however, it was otherwise : speaking roughly, people then were either religious or irreligious, and there was nothing between ; Bacon wrote an essay on Atheism ; Greene, prince of reprobates, but never atheist through conviction, repented, and died Christian, and he brought no charge of atheism against Shakespeare. Marlowe, on the other hand, was sceptic, if not atheist, and he became a marked man in consequence ; for such a frame of mind was then the exception, and Shakespeare was religionist and theist along with the majority.

But the fact that Shakespeare was not called atheist by his fellows need not be relied on, I believe, in any attempt to estimate his moral character or his religion : that he was well acquainted with the Bible, and accepted the current theology of his day, and respected goodness, and sometimes at least held by his convictions, may be surely discovered in his writings. Much, perhaps, depends on the mental attitude of the investigator. The modern

mind that has eagerly shaken off its Christianity may itself become dogmatic ; it may decline to acknowledge religion in others, even the great writers of the past, or it will be disposed to laugh thereat, and to deprecate its influence. To such a mind, therefore, Shakespeare is both atheist and libertine, and he is little or nothing more : indeed, we are asked to believe not only that he had no religion, but also that he was without the spiritual, almost without the moral sense. I may, perhaps, be pardoned if in no mood of reaction, but in the hope of getting nearer to the truth, I attempt to do justice to some qualities of the great poet which seem to me to have been neglected.

My thanks are due to Mr. Frederic Harrison for revision and suggestions in regard to Essays II, III, IV, and V. Also to Sir A. W. Ward for his kind help in revising the proofs. I have also to thank Mr. J. W. Mackail for some valuable suggestions.

MORTON LUCE.

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Shakespeare

The Man and His Work

I

SOME NEW FACTS ABOUT THE SONNETS

IN this long series of sonnets, which perhaps conceal as much as they reveal, some recent commentators seem to discover Shakespeare as a riotous liver, and a weakling, and forthwith, turning to his plays, identify him with the wickedness and weakness of half his characters. In the same poems, moreover, they detect him in criminal alliance with a young and handsome and dissolute Dark Lady, and again passing on to the dramas, find that she is the prototype of all the unworthiness of more than half the poet's highly-

dramatised female characters ; but further, they make her responsible for the life of the dramatist and his dramas, and the life, as thus discovered, is a contemptible one.

Of course, there is an element of truth in all this. An artist cannot altogether detach himself from his experience or his creations ; but we must be careful not to put the element for the whole truth, and most careful to get an authentic experience, and judge of it cautiously and soberly.

Indeed, to my mind, the results arrived at by the forementioned commentators are appalling, and they compel a close examination of the poems that are responsible for such “ bugs and goblins ” in the poet’s biography.

To begin with this much debated Dark Lady, who has been identified (if I may give one example), with the beautiful Mary Fitton in her teens, will she bear our close scrutiny ? I think not.

As most of us will remember, two of the Sonnets, Nos. 138 and 144,¹ were included

¹ As published in 1609.

in the *Passionate Pilgrim* of 1599.¹ The following is the text of the 138th Sonnet, as it appears in this volume, the words in italics denoting variations from the text of 1609—

“ When my love swears that she is made
of truth,
I do believe her, though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutor'd
youth,
Unskilful in the world's false *forges*.
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me
young,
Although *I know my years be past the*
best,
I smiling credit her false-speaking
tongue,
Out-facing faults in love with love's
ill rest.
But wherefore says *my love that she is*
young?
And wherefore say not I that I am old ?
O, love's best habit is *a soothing tongue*,
And age, in love, loves not to have years
told.

¹ Although we may not trust the title-page of this volume as re-issued in 1612, we may just note the wording : “ Certaine amorous Sonnets between Venus and Adonis.”

*Therefore I'll lie with love, and love
with me,
Since that our faults in love thus
smother'd be."*

Of this sonnet the argument appears to be as follows : " Our mutual falsehoods in Love's service include disguise of our advancing years," and for a paraphrase I should propose the following—

" When my love, pleading youth (lines 7 and 9, and whole trend of thought), swears she speaks true, I pretend to believe her, although she lies ; for I like her to regard me as an innocent, easily - gulled youth, unpractised in common methods of deceit. In this way, vainly believing that she thinks me young (though, of course, I know that I am not), so, when she tells me that she is young, I smile as though she were telling the truth ; and thus I attempt to cloak our mutual faults with love—but a love ill at ease.

" But why does my lady assert that she is young, and why cannot I confess that I am old ? Merely because in love we must have no jarring words, and lovers do not care to confess their years, at any rate when the years are advanced like ours.

Therefore we lie mutually to one another,
and by this effort of love disguise our faults."

Let us now compare the text of Sonnet 138, as we read it in the volume of 1609—

" When my love swears that she is made
of truth

I do believe her, though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutor'd
youth,

Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks
me young,

Although she knows my days are past
the best,

Simply I credit her false-speaking
tongue :

On both sides thus is simple truth
suppress'd.

But wherefore says she not she is
unjust ?

And wherefore say not I that I am old ?
O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not to have years
told :

Therefore I lie with her and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be."

This time we have for argument : " Our
mutual falsehoods in Love's service include
assurance of faithfulness on her part, and

of youth on mine," and the paraphrase may be as follows : " When my love assures me of her fidelity, I pretend to believe her, although she lies, for I like her to regard me as an innocent youth, unpractised in the world's methods of deceit. In this way, vainly believing that she thinks me young, although of course she knows that there is none of the youth left in me, in affected simplicity I give assent to her remarks. And why ? Why does she not confess that she prevaricates, and why cannot I say outright that I am not young ? It is because love thrives best on an affectation of mutual confidence, and lovers do not like to confess advanced years on either side. Therefore we lie to one another (or, if you will, share the same bed), and we disguise our faults by the flattery of falsehood."

It will now be seen that the sonnets differ in two important particulars. In the *Passionate Pilgrim* copy the lady, like the lover, is elderly—at least, she is no longer young ; in that sonnet also there is no suggestion of sexual intercourse.

Now it may be assumed that the sonnets 138 and 144 of the 1609 volume are amended versions of the same sonnets in the *Passionate Pilgrim* of 1599,¹ and we are at once forced to the conclusion that Shakespeare heightened the effect of his improved version by keeping the lady's age out of sight, and by adding—in the punning fashion he could seldom resist²—an illicit intercourse.

Nor, as far as I can discover, does the poet anywhere hint that the lady is young; apart from the foregoing, her general appearance is that of a well-seasoned wanton, “the bay where all men ride.”³ Of course, I am not yet concerned with the question as to whether she is any real personage.

¹ No comment, I believe, is necessary to show that the differences in the *Passionate Pilgrim* text are earlier readings in Shakespeare's own hand, or that the changes in the 1609 copies are improvements such as Shakespeare alone would make. Further, one text is as good as the other; both appear to be surreptitious.

² Of this particular pun he never tired, and I suspect we have it again in the “lies” of line 14.

³ Otherwise, “the wide world's commonplace” (Sonnet 137).

But next, in popular estimate, she is a lady of the Court, as beautiful as she is young ; yet her beauty also¹ is more than doubtful. In a reference to her personal appearance (135), which has a suspicion of banter, the poet declares that good wine needs no bush. He had said much the same (53, 21, and often forgot the fact) when writing of his friend ; and a like sentiment may be found in his plays, and in other poets. For reasons to be given later we will reserve the expression, “The statute of thy beauty” (134), while we admit the “pretty looks” of 139 : “looks,” we may note, is almost synonymous with “eyes” : “Thine eyes I love,” says the poet in 132, and in lines 5-9 of this sonnet their witchery is thus set forth—

“ And truly not the morning sun of
heaven
Better becomes the grey cheeks of the
east,
Nor that full star that ushers in the even
Doth half that glory to the sober west,
As those two mourning eyes become
thy face.”

¹ The same may be said of her social position.

But here again, in this fine passage, there lurks a suspicion of banter,¹ and we may now say generally that the references to the lady's personal appearance tell against all beauty; indeed, the poet makes a point of protesting that she has no beauty whatever. Her "face hath not the power to make love groan," or thus—

"For I have sworn thee fair; more
perjured I
To swear against the truth so foul a
lie";

¹ "The strangest, ineffectual, half-humorous half-ludicrous imagery."—*Davidson*. Perhaps what Davidson thought strange (though such criticism of Shakespeare has its perils) was that one eye should be compared to the sun and the other to the evening star (cf. *Romeo and Juliet*, i. ii. 25), or that mourning eyes, eyes that "have put on black," should be compared to the morning sun. It is more to our purpose to note that the poet's intention is made plainer in Sonnet 127, or in *Love's Labour's Lost*, iv. iii. 258-61. There the black eyes of the Dark Lady mourn over the borrowed beauties of the fair. The conceit, as Sir Sidney Lee points out (and this is true also of Sonnet 132), is traceable to Sidney. As to the eye doctrine generally, which pervades both the Sonnets and *Love's Labour's Lost*, it dates far back, even to Aristotle and Plato.

Or again—

“ For I have sworn thee fair, and thought
thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as
night.”

This blackness must now engage our attention, and as a general introduction to the subject, I may quote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, v. i. 10—

“ The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of
Egypt,”¹

for such, in no small degree, are the lover and the lady in these sonnets. In his lyric mood Shakespeare never forgets to be dramatic, and when dramatic he is as lyrical as may be. Here his motive appears to be twofold—to praise unconventional black as opposed to conventional

¹ That is, the face of a gypsy; such a brow as Cleopatra's. “ Me That am with Phœbus' amorous pinches black” (Cleopatra, however, was in reality fair); such again as we have in the line, “ Juno but an Ethiope were.” The historic and relative claims of black and white in complexions or persons had evidently been Shakespeare's study “—In the old age black was not counted fair” (Sonnet 127), and they are fully set forth in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

fairness, and to praise it more especially because fairness so often called in artificial aids to beauty ; and these were his peculiar aversion. In something of this spirit he made his grandest hero out of a " thick-lipped Moor," and his grandest heroine is the traditionally swarthy Cleopatra. Hence we may explain the peculiar reading—

" *Therefore*¹ my mistress' brows² are
raven black,
Her eyes so suited . . ." (127) ;

which may perhaps be interpreted,
" Therefore the mistress I shall con-

¹ With this it will be instructive to compare,
" And therefore is she born to make black fair."—
Love's Labour's Lost, iv. iii. 260.

² Cf. " Or if in black my lady's brows be
deck'd."—*Love's Labour's Lost*, iv. iii. 258. In
the quotation from Sonnet 127 " brows " is
substituted for the quarto " eyes." It may
stand for the forehead or the face generally, or
merely for the eyebrows, as in " A {wightly} wanton
with a velvet brow."—*Love's Labour's Lost*,
iii. i. 48 ; but other readings suggested are
" hairs " or " locks," which are more in keeping
with the raven-black simile. See also *Love's
Labour's Lost*, iv. iii. 188.

ventionally celebrate in these sonnets shall be painted black," etc.¹

How black? is our next question: in eyes, in hair, and in hue, as I think, if we may trust the "black wires grow on her head" of 130, and "her breasts are dun" in the same sonnet, and yet other passages.

All this may appear trifling; but besides the fact that its importance will be recognised as we proceed, we have to take note of the mass of literature which seeks to prove that the lady of the *Sonnets* is a court damsel, young and handsome. As it appears, our lady is already elderly and ugly; not merely dark, or an attractive brunette, but an "Ethiope," "colour'd ill" (144); in fact, the "brow of Egypt" we assumed when this investigation opened.

But we might learn a good deal more from our introductory sonnet. If the poet and his paramour so thoroughly understood

¹ See Sonnet 21. Perhaps in the same spirit he insists upon the lady's "unworthiness" (150). We may also remember what appears to have been his original intention of making her elderly.

one another, what need of a courtly nobleman as go-between? And further, a lady of this type, a common wanton, whom "others do abhor," whose "face hath not the power to make love groan," was not in the least qualified to ensnare the noble friend who came as ambassador for love.¹ And finally, from her person and her character as thus set forth, she seems as little qualified to arouse or reward or torture the passion of the poet himself, and by no means to become the goddess of a lifetime, at whose shrine he never ceased to worship, and to whom we are indebted for all his faults and all his virtues and all his dramas.

But what if amid these obscurities we discern the figure of another woman? Will the mist roll away, or will the plot merely thicken unresolved? This we must now endeavour to ascertain, and, as it happens, the second of the two sonnets printed in the *Passionate Pilgrim* will serve admirably

¹ In the dramas, again, we have sufficient examples of the suing woman and the betraying friend, and these incidents in the *Sonnets* have some flourish of the stage in their manner of presentation.

by way of introduction to this conjectured lady. Of this sonnet the following is the 1609 version—¹

“ Two loves I have of comfort and
despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me
still ;
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman colour’d ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my
side ² ;
And would corrupt my saint to be a
devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
And whether that my angel be turn’d
fiend
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell ;

¹ Among minor variations in the *Passionate Pilgrim* copy are “That” for “Which” in line 2, and “My” for “The” in lines 3 and 4. Line 13 reads: “The truth I shall not know.” This, apart from metrical reasons, seems to imply that the 1609 version of the story gave the reader plenty of the general truth, and in the *Passionate Pilgrim* reading the doubt is limited to the incident of the one sonnet.

² Oddly enough, the *Passionate Pilgrim* version here corrects the Quarto “sight.”

But being both from me, both to each friend

I guess one angel in another's hell :

Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,

Till my bad angel fire my good one out."

Turning to the *Passionate Pilgrim* version, we note that line 11 reads thus—

"For being both to me, both to each friend,"

and we find that the 1609 copy has replaced "to me" by "from me." Why was the change made? Certainly not to improve the metre. Here, with the accent on "me" it is good enough; but in the other line—

"But being both from me, both to each friend"—

it is less orderly, and seems to require the word "a" before "friend."

Now, the former line may be thus rendered: "For since they both owe me an allegiance which they renounce by their illicit love," whereas the second line appears

to mean, “ But (we note the change from ‘ For ’) now that they are intriguing against me in absence, where I cannot reach them.” Why does the poet introduce this idea of absence ? Is it an afterthought, and is the sonnet thus made to tally with other sonnets of intrigue, which seem to make it an affair of absence ?¹ Possibly. But before passing on to the intrigue, of which this sonnet appears to be the opening chapter, or perhaps the *envoy*, we must attend to some other changes of reading ; and first we bring forward the quotation that was reserved on a former page : “ The statute of thy beauty ”—for in this case also we have to make question of the lady’s attractions. We remember the “ pretty looks ” of the other woman, and regard the new phrase with our former suspicion. And first we ask, “ Why, with such personal attractiveness, need this

¹ Perhaps the incident of absence was introduced gradually, and, as it seems, on more than one occasion. The betrayal, as I read it, took place when the poet was absent from his friend ; nor do I think that the embassage of love is anywhere clearly indicated.

woman play the part of wooer?" Yet in 41 we read of the friend—

" Beauteous thou art, therefore to be
assail'd ;
And when a woman woos, what woman's
son
Will sourly leave her till she¹ have
prevail'd ? "

Is the poet dramatising again, and bringing his Adonis, if not also his Venus, on the stage of his sonnets? I almost think so. However, with the exception of "Her cruel eye," which belongs equally to the Dark Lady, I find no other hint of the charms of this new character; and if we may trust our sonnet she is "colour'd ill." But this appears beyond all doubt to identify her with the other woman, and if so, like a dissolving view, the Dark Lady emerges as the lady of the intrigue. But further, this "colour'd ill" phrase is opposed to "right fair" in the line preceding; that is to say, we have *dark ugliness* contrasted with *light beauty*. "And therefore is she born to make black

¹ Quarto, "he."

fair" (*Love's Labour's Lost*, iv. iii. 260). Nor must we forget the tell-tale evidence so often afforded by a change of reading, and that evidence is here forthcoming. The word "fair" (line 8) of the *Passionate Pilgrim* version, becomes "foul" in the 1609 copy. The new word does not serve merely as a contrast to "purity," or as a change which avoids the repetition of "fair" in line 3.¹ Other considerations had their weight. *Foul* as the opposite of *fair*—ugliness, that is, and darkness as opposed to light beauty, is common in these sonnets and in Shakespeare generally—

" In the old age black was not counted
fair" ;

or again—

" For I have thought thee fair, and sworn
thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as
night" ;

¹ Shakespeare was not over-careful in such matters. See, for example the very first sonnet, where we find the "tender" of line 4 repeated in line 12; and "making a famine" in line 7 is followed by "makest waste" in line 12.

and that *foul* is *black* we learn from "fairing the foul" in line 127, or thus—

"Then will I swear beauty herself is
black,
And all they foul that thy complexion
lack."

Foul, therefore, in this line of the *Passionate Pilgrim* sonnet connotes *black*, and now we see the poet's purpose. The word is used to repeat and emphasise the "colour'd ill" of line 4. Nor again, I think, can we escape the conclusion that here again we have the Dark Lady, "colour'd ill," "black as hell," a "female evil."

But this latter phrase brings before us another characteristic of that "false plague," the Dark Lady, her "unworthiness," to wit. Upon this, as we have seen, the poet insists as strongly as upon her dark ugliness, and possibly with the same purpose.¹ Examples are too abundant to need quoting; and further, as to the "pride" (line 8) of this second woman, we are twice informed of the Dark Lady's

¹ See footnote, p. 22.

"proud heart," her tyranny, her cruel disdain; and lastly, the eyes of the Dark Lady also "woo," she "makes me sin" (line 141). Surely the Dark Lady and this intrigue lady are one.

But in order to reach a final conclusion in regard to the women, or the two women, who are endowed with veiled notoriety in these sonnets, we must briefly review the story of intrigue, of which, as stated above, this sonnet may be the opening chapter. But at the very outset we encounter another difficulty; in fact, let me here give it as my opinion that the best service a writer on the sonnets can render to the reading public is to point out difficulties, and add caution upon caution against hasty or dogmatic interpretation. For as regards this seemingly definite story of intrigue, probably no two critics would be agreed upon the sonnets that should comprise it,¹

¹ Sir Sidney Lee says (*Life of Shakespeare*, page 154): "In these six sonnets alone (144, 40, 41, 42, 133, 134) does he categorically assign his mistress's alienation to the fascinations of a dear friend, or hint at such a cause for his mistress's infidelity." But on page 98 we read: "He

and the connection I have been trying to establish between this intrigue and the affair of the Dark Lady makes selection more difficult, or puts an end to it. In any case, we meet with contradictions and discrepancies.

However, let us keep the two stories apart, if possible, and examine the sonnets that deal especially with a wooing woman and a betraying friend. In this introductory sonnet, No. 144, the poet, as I have hinted, seems bent on heightening by every possible means the contrast between the good and bad angels. His friend is "my saint," and the lady a "female evil." He is compelled to carry out the notion of the utterly good and the utterly bad attendant spirit, as we find them so often in his plays;

has sought and won the favour of the poet's mistress in the poet's absence, but the poet is forgiving (32-35, 40-42, 69, 95, 96). And on the next page he writes: "Apparently continuing a theme of the first 'group,' the poet rebukes the woman whom he addresses for having beguiled his friend to yield himself to her seductions (133-136)." It may be added that Mr. Beeching (*The Sonnets of Shakespeare*, Introduction, page xxxvii) argues with cogency that the second *Will* in 135 is Shakespeare's friend.

but unless we place this sonnet near the beginning of the series, we shall find that the friend has no title whatever to saintship. Some of his grave faults are indicated quite early in the sequence. Next we note the words, "To win me soon to hell." They ring true at first: the poet loses his friend, and the friend loses his morals, his purity, his saintship. But in Sonnet 40 we read—

"Be blamed, if thou thyself deceivest
By wilful taste of what thyself
refusest" ;

his friend's act is "hate's known injury"; he "sourly robs from me"; he is "lascivious grace,"—

"Nor can thy shame give physic to my
grief" (34) ;

he "kills his friend with spites." Then adds the poet: "Yet we must not be foes." Are these last words the key to the situation? I hope not, and I think not.¹

¹ Perhaps the following from *Wit's Commonwealth* (1598) may throw light on the situation, and on the doctrine of the sonnets generally: "The love of men to women is a thing common and of course, but the friendship of man to man infinite and immortal."

" But," it will be said, " this is not altogether in conflict with the preliminary announcement: ' The woman tempted me, and I did eat'; she would ' corrupt my saint to be a devil.' " Yet even if we grant that the lady had charms that might betray a handsome young noble, we shall find, I think, that the friend has no clearer title to the new rank of devil than to the old rank of saint; for next we read (41)—

" Those pretty wrongs that liberty
commits
When I am sometime absent from thy
heart,
Thy beauty and thy years full well
befits."

This is the " lascivious grace " again ; there is no devilry whatever in this youth's licentiousness, nor in the woman's, we add ; if any, it is in the youth's " self-doing crime"—

" Ay me ! but yet thou mightst my
seat forbear."

Then, later, we have the “yet be blamed” over again; and lastly—

“Chide thy beauty and thy straying youth

Who lead thee in their riot even there

Where thou art forced to break a twofold truth.”

To pursue the subject any further would be profitless, and we again learn that it is impossible to take the poet literally, even if seriously, anywhere. I will only add my impression as derived from all I can gather of the situation. It comes to this, that if I were called upon to choose between the faithless man and the faithless woman, I should certainly choose the latter. But again, and this is the important point, have we as a fact to choose between either? This question may find some answer later on, and perhaps even now we are not justified in drawing a second and more obvious moral from the incident, namely, that if the poet (who is not without his own “blots” and “bewailed guilt” (36)), had so little regard for the woman—

“I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief”;

(where again we note that the friend, not the woman, is the robber)

“ That she hath thee is of my wailing
chief,

A loss in love that touches me more
nearly ”;

if, I, say the woman could thus be slighted, then her disdain, her refusal, and what not, merely prove that she had formed a correct estimate of her man. And yet again, as it appears, she does love him (42), she, the poet’s “ seat ” (41), as Desdemona was Othello’s, or his “ hearted throne ”; in other words, she had not refused her love, the poet had his will of her; and it was the same in regard to the other woman—if there was another woman.

Nor am I sure that our perplexities will lessen as we proceed to examine our next piece of evidence. The last sonnet of the series (152, we assume) opens thus—

“ In loving thee thou know’st I am
forsworn,

But thou art twice forsworn, to me
love swearing ;

In act thy bed-vow broke, and new
faith torn
In vowing new hate after new love
bearing."

At the first glance this should be the most real of all the sonnets, brimful of portentous biography, and terribly distinct with personality. And could anything be plainer than the meaning of the four lines as they stand: "I broke my marriage vow when I yielded to your charms, but you are doubly perjured; first you were false to your husband, and now you are false to me, for your love has turned to hate."

But what if we have here a connecting-link with our former subject? And I may mention that one recent authority on the sonnets of Shakespeare, the late Mr. G. Wyndham, is inclined to associate this incident with the story of intrigue, and if I have succeeded in establishing the identity of the Dark Lady with the intrigue lady, our critic is right, and the woman deserted the poet for the friend. However, we will dismiss that question,

and confront a more momentous difficulty. Shakespeare, a married man, has chosen for his mistress a married woman, and now she hates him. This is a serious matter, and we had better trace the history of the affair through some of the sonnets preceding. Yet again, as a preliminary step I should venture to repeat my text—

“The lover all as frantic
Sees Helen’s beauty in a brow of
Egypt”;

for if we begin our investigation at Sonnet 147, we find that the lover is indeed frantic, and that his frenzy is a matter of discovering beauty in ugliness. In this sonnet he is *frantic mad* (line 10)—

“For I have sworn thee fair and thought
thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as
night.”

Of such lovers and madmen we read again in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: they

“Have such seething brains . . .
that apprehend
More than cool reason ever com-
prehends.”

So in this sonnet—

“ Past cure I am, now reason is past
care . . .

My thoughts and my discourse as
madmen’s are.”

But let us abandon our text, though it applies equally to 148, and pass on to 149. Here the woman has doubt of the poet’s affection, and, as we may infer, loves him ; but in the same sonnet she hates him *and loves others*. Yet again (150), she ought to love him, because he loves her, a loveless person *whom others do abhor*. And yet again, in 151, she has a “sweet self,” and he has won it : she is his “triumphant prize.” But further, he did wrong to love her, yet it was her fault, and she betrayed him ; and then, as we have seen in 152, they are both in fault ; it was a guilty love, yet she was more guilty than he because she renounced the guilty love ! As to her getting a new lover, a woman of such “unworthiness,” whom “others do abhor”—impossible. And yet again, if we leave this group of six, and follow the story as we read it in 137–142 it becomes

stranger still. We place first the significant fact that both the poet and the woman have been false to many others, the one as often as the other (142) : how, then, could she have broken her vow for him, or he for her ? How could she be false to him only ? But further, she loves the poet, and then again she does not: she loves elsewhere, though others note in her "a thousand errors." She has a "foul face,"¹ and "pretty looks"; all other men despise her, only the poet has given her love. Yet she is "*the bay where all men ride*"—and the poet knows it.

It seems, therefore, that whether as the lady of the intrigue, or as mere mistress, the woman has an impossible story, utterly untrustworthy as material for biography; nothing, surely, could make either affair more unintelligible or more unreal; both are phantasmagorial, kaleidoscopic, and we only confirm our former statement, that

¹ Here again we have "foul" connoting "black"—

"To put fair truth upon so foul a face," where the darkness of the face is contrasted with the brightness of truth.

if we take these sonnets literally almost anywhere, we enter a maze of which we shall never find the centre.

And now, with this experience fresh in our minds, we return to the starting-point, and with eyes more practised read again the four portentous lines (1-4 of 152), and merely remark that their context has robbed them of all validity.

At this point I will record my impression that more than one, perhaps more than two women are rendered obscurely immortal in these sonnets. Here and there a single sonnet, I believe, is sometimes complimentary (or otherwise) to a lady friend of the poet; and the mere triviality of some of the incidents (I refer also to the male friend, and to the rival poet, or poets) as well as the occasional note of passion, the *cri du coeur*, make for reality. We have, for example, 110 and 111, which strike a biographical chord, like Spenser's—

“ So am I made the servant of the manie,
And laughing stock . . . ”¹

¹ *Teares of the Muses.*

For all that, the main issues, I repeat, are so confused or disguised that as biographical material they are most untrustworthy. Possibly we might know more if we had the sonnets in a different order, or if they had been edited by the author ; possibly we have not all of them ; possibly we have too many.

But if our attempts to realise the woman end in a *reductio ad absurdum*, what of the other personages in this bewildering drama, the poet and his friend ?¹ They, surely, are less shadowy. I hardly think so. Apt enough here is the eloquence of the late John Davidson : " Why may not the persons of the sonnets be the symbols of a poetic shorthand, of which the key perished with Shakespeare himself ? " Or again : " We need not fit names either to the friend or the mistress ; the friend is man, the mistress woman." And before proceeding to an analysis of the strictly personal element in our two remaining

¹ The rival poet, or poets, are not so pertinent to this inquiry ; but here again, I believe, we have much that is fictitious or merely conventional.

characters, I will bring forward another quotation—

“ Not easily forgiven
Are those who, setting wide the doors
that bar
The secret bridal chambers of the
heart
Let in the day ”;

and this, by the way, reminds us of Browning's caustic remark: “ Did Shakespeare? if so, the less Shakespeare he ! ”

As in the former case, we may begin with the question of age. We will take Sonnet 73, which is probably familiar to all of us—

“ That time of year thou may'st in me
behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few,
do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against
the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet
birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such
day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,

Which by and by black night doth
take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all
in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such
fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must
expire,
Consumed with that which it was
nourish'd by ;
This thou perceivest, which makes
thy love more strong
To love that well which thou
must leave ere long."

Here we have the picture of a man in the very winter of life—past autumn, for the choirs are bare and ruined. He might be eighty, he should not be less than seventy, or shall we put it at sixty, the "threescore" of Sonnet 11? He is further compared to the twilight that follows sunset and precedes night. He is approaching the very dissolution of old age: in the couplet he has not long to live.

Now if we were to suppose that this sonnet was written in 1608, the year before

the publication of the sonnet volume,¹ Shakespeare was forty-four at the time of writing. Could this be the Shakespeare of the sonnet? And what if, for reasons to be given later, the date of writing were some fourteen, or at least ten years earlier? But I have selected this 73rd Sonnet as a first illustration because it is by far the most direct and eloquent of the whole series; it is free from the too frequent affectations, conceits, hyperboles: regarded by itself, it is poetry, and poetry as natural as it is fine. But if in its context this superb production rings false, what shall be said of the rest, or at least of the dozens of sonnets that present to us the "crush'd and o'erworn" poet, whose "blood is drain'd," who has "travell'd on to age's sleepy night," who is—

" Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity"?

I confess that I am bewildered at the prospect.

But are we to take the writer seriously? Seldom, as I think. Are we to take him

¹ Registered May, 1609.

seriously even here in the finest of these poems, where his words have all the clearness of superlative beauty? Probably not. Let us turn to Sonnet 2—

“ When forty winters shall besiege thy
brow . . . ”

where “forty winters” is generally understood to be put figuratively for “old age,” and not for “forty years added to your present age.” Here, then, the poet’s possible forty-four limit is made plausible, since old age is represented by forty. But again, is it a serious statement? Granting that a man of forty in those Elizabethan times was our man of fifty; even thus we cannot admit old age. What is the explanation? It is the explanation that accounts for so much that is unintelligible in these poems; it is a convention of the sonneteer. And our brief remaining note is to the effect that other sonneteers are old at thirty, and earlier.

Let us now turn from the aged man to his friend, the “lovely boy” of 126, which is sometimes regarded as an *envoi* to the first series; or, if we are in doubt, and we ought

to be, that this “lovely boy” is the poet’s friend, we will choose the “sweet boy” of 108. Now, ought not this to be our first reflection, that if the sonnet convention can bring a man of seventy back to thirty, it can also bring the man of thirty or twenty-five back to youth, and this surely is a more possible transformation.¹ And as a fact, if we follow this “boy” or youth throughout the series, and even if we make allowance for possible deviations from some due order of the sonnets, we find that he varies greatly and unmistakably in respect of years; but the same may be said of his social position, his experience, his character: they are all at variance. To give details is impossible here. I can only point to the fact; there are contradictions and discrepancies without number.

¹ I have had occasion (p. 29) to point out the heightened contrast between the “man right fair,” and the “woman colour’d ill,” the “female evil” of Sonnet 144. Here I would call attention to the effect of antithesis derived from an over-statement of age and ugliness on the one hand and of youth and beauty on the other.

But these contradictions and discrepancies will be found in almost all the subject-matter of the sonnets. Compare, for example, the following statements—

- (a) Only children can give you immortality.
- (b) I shall not attempt to make you immortal by my verse.
- (c) Only my verse can give you immortality.
- (d) I will make you immortal by my verse.

But these are of minor importance, and we should next point out that if the sonnets, in regard to their personages and their topics, are a snare to the unwary, so also in regard to textual interpretation they are a snare to those who take them too literally or carelessly, or who read into them their own notions, moral or immoral. Critics who set out with a determination to bring Shakespeare down to their own level of morality, who defy that loftiest caution of the poet Davidson—"Never in any case read into them a loathsome meaning"—may take a lesson

from one of their choicest examples. I refer to Sonnet 23—

“ As an imperfect actor on the stage,
Who with his fear is put besides his
part,
Or some fierce thing replete with too
much rage,
Whose strength’s abundance weakens
his own heart,
So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love’s rite,
And in mine own love’s strength seem
to decay,
O’ercharged with burden of mine own
love’s might.
O, let my books be then the eloquence
And dumb presagers of my speaking
breast,
Who plead for love and look for
recompense
More than that tongue that more hath
more express’d.
O, learn to read what silent love hath
writ :
To hear with eyes belongs to love’s
fine wit.”

I shall do no more than hint at the meanings which some experts in the Black Art have conjured out of this sonnet. As

far as I can determine, its harmless purport is merely this: "When my love fails of utterance you must read my verse"; and this, I believe, is the full thought of the sonnet itself: "As an actor unused to the stage is apt to be nervous, and forget some of his part, so when I wish to utter in your presence all the ceremony of Love's ritual, I lack confidence, and leave much unsaid; or again, as some fierce creature exhausts itself by the mere force of its passion, so the very violence and force of my great love overpowers me, and renders me faint and dumb before you. But, returning to the actor—let the stage-prompting-book declaim for me in silence, and like a prologue of dumb show reveal my silent-speaking heart, which will thus protest its love, and look to receive a fuller reward than hearts that effusively utter themselves through the tongue. Learn, therefore, to read in this book of my heart its silent record of love; it is the finest faculty of love thus to be able to hear through the medium of the eye."

Apparently, therefore, there is nothing

whatever of immorality in the sonnet; only the usual conceits and hyperbole. The reading of “looks” for “books” in line 9, though adopted by Mr. Beeching, is, I think, rightly rejected by another eminent editor, Sir Sidney Lee. In support of the reading “books” we note the word “look,” in line 11; next, “books” maintains the simile of the actor. We have elsewhere in Shakespeare a “without book prologue,” and the phrase “to con without book.”¹ The figure is also preserved by the “dumb presagers” of line 10. As for “the perfect ceremony of love’s rite,” we may compare—

“ All sanctimonious ceremony may
With full and holy rite be ministered.”

The Tempest, iv. i. 17.

And for “rage” and “decay” in lines 3 and 8 we have—

“ I was dry with rage and extreme toil,
Breathless and faint.”

I Henry IV, i. iii. 31.

Yet more might be urged in favour of our interpretation, and these details will be

¹ Also in other dramatists of the time.

pardoned if we allow that one or two facts about Shakespeare are worth the seeking; to get at a diamond we often have to dig through whole beds of mineral rubbish.

I have no space for further interpretations under this head, but a few words may be added on the date of these sonnets. The subject is worth re-handling, because many of the sonnet theories are based on an assumption of date, and some recent opinion would extend the period of composition of these poems beyond 1598 or even 1600. In my judgment the evidence, if weighed carefully, gives us the two limiting dates of 1594 and 1597. The significance of the two dates will appear later.

We have, to begin with, the evidence of Meres, who in his book of 1598¹ speaks of Shakespeare's "sugred sonnets among his private friends," where "among" may be variously taken. It may mean "circulated among" (in MS.), or "addressed to," or "dedicated to," or "on the subject of," or "submitted to for

¹ *Palladis Tamia*.

appreciation"; and it may mean, and probably does, something of all these.

It appears from the volume of 1609 that the sonnets were then printed for the first time, and if so, Meres read them in MS. For all that, I see no reason to suppose that what he read were other poems than these sonnets, or that only a few appeared in the MS. He must surely have read them in bulk, as one of the sequences then in vogue, otherwise he would hardly have ranked them with such considerable poems as the *Venus* and the *Lucrece*; nor would he have found in them "the wittie soul of Ovid," whether he refers to their manner, or to their numerous obligations to that writer. His date, moreover, of 1598 may allow us to refer his reading to the year 1597.

Next, the *Passionate Pilgrim* of 1599, which reprints certain verses from *Love's Labour's Lost*, prints also, as we have seen, two of the sonnets; and these, it must now be noted, are near the end of the series, and therefore presumably among the last to be written. Apart, however, from the question

of their order, they seem to imply a series to precede them ; Sonnet 144 appears to indicate a period of absence, as well as the friend's unfaith, and could hardly find an early place in the series ; and 138, which is addressed to a woman, may justify its present position near the end.

Accordingly we may refer them, and with them the bulk of the sonnets, to the year 1598, if not 1597. Moreover, as we have seen, they represent an earlier draft ; and the verses from *Love's Labour's Lost*, which are included in the *Passionate Pilgrim*, may represent in whatever form the earlier draft of the play.

Now the play, *Love's Labour's Lost*, printed in 1598, appears to have been revised by the end of 1597, and if these extracts represent an earlier draft, so the pirated sonnets may represent some date anterior to 1597 ; but on this point I lay no stress. My purpose is gained if I fix 1597 as the date by which the greater number of the sonnets were composed.

With regard to any relation that may exist between Shakespeare's sonnets and the

Avisa of Henry Willobie, 1594, or the other sonnet sequences that appeared about the same time, I have only to remark that such a relation helps to confirm the date I am endeavouring to establish, that is to say, 1597 as a downward limit; but, as I venture to think, the testimony of Meres and the *Passionate Pilgrim* is sufficient for our purpose. As to the other date I mentioned, 1594, it will be found convenient if we take the poet literally,¹ where he speaks (104) of a three years' interval; we may then assume that the first portion of his series was completed by 1594.

But I shall be told that at least one sonnet, and the one that is clearly stamped with its date, belongs to the year 1603. I refer to Sonnet 107, which reads as follows—

“ Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic
soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things
to come,

¹ Where so much is conventional, these periods of absence in the sonnets may also be conventional; but the average of poetic quality after the supposed interval seems somewhat higher. On the other hand, we have good and bad work at intervals throughout the series.

Can yet the lease of my true love control,
Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.
The mortal moon hath her eclipse
endured,
And the sad augurs mock their own
presage ;
Incertainies now crown themselves
assured,
And peace proclaims olives of endless age.
Now with the drops of this most balmy
time
My love looks fresh, and Death to me
subscribes,
Since, spite of him, I 'll live in this poor
rhyme
While he insults o'er dull and speechless
tribes :
And thou in this shalt find thy monu-
ment,
When tyrants' crests and tombs of
brass are spent."

In this sonnet most critics find a clear reference to the death of Elizabeth, the peaceful accession of James, and the release of Southampton from the Tower, all of which events come into the chronicle of 1603. I see no great harm in the admission, and it is quite possible that Shakespeare wrote a few sonnets after 1600. Yet as to this sonnet, I

find no incontestable proof that it refers to the events above-mentioned. The crux is contained in lines 5 and 6—

“ The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured,

And the sad augurs mock their own presage,”

and these must be carefully examined. Now in the preceding sonnet Shakespeare had introduced the subject of prophecy—“divining eyes” of the past had not skill enough to prefigure his friend’s worth in “these present days.” From this he passes to a consideration of prophecy in relation to his own present convictions. Should it predict his love as becoming less after the lapse of years? He will not admit the relevance of any such forecast. As to the figure of an eclipse in line 6, it suggests a temporary not a final extinction. So in

35—¹

¹ Where it is used of dark fault clouding the friend’s brightness, and is a variation on the sun breaking through clouds in the preceding sonnet; and this, I believe, is the meaning here. But further, under any other interpretation the line, “And the sad augurs mock their own presage,” seems to lose all its point.

“Clouds and eclipses stain both sun and moon,”

and the meaning of the two lines seems to be this: “The moon (whether the Queen,¹ or the moon of my love,² or both) which according to prophecy was doomed to die, has come forth undimmed from what was merely a temporary eclipse, and the dismal prophets are now compelled to laugh at their vain forebodings.” Moreover, this interpretation lends support to the fourth line of the sonnet—

“Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom,”

which means, “My love for my friend which people idly supposed would last only for some limited period”³ (“confined doom” = doom of limitation). As to the “crowned

¹ Miss C. C. Stopes suggests the Queen's climacteric year, 1596, and the measures taken by the Council to anticipate rebellion or revolution that might follow on her illness.

² Or “mortal” may have the meaning of “our earthly.”

³ Compare George Meredith—

“I cannot be at peace
In having love upon a mortal lease.”

Modern Love.

certainty" of his love, it is stated more explicitly in Sonnet 115—

"Alas, why, fearing of Time's tyranny,
Might I not then say, 'Now I love you
best,'

When I was certain o'er uncertainty,
Crowning the present . . ."

That is, "I was wrong in what I then asserted—wrong in calling full-grown a love that never ceases to grow." I may add that a paraphrase of the whole sonnet will be found on page 93 of my *Handbook to Shakespeare*.

It need scarcely be pointed out that if the reference is not to the death of the Queen, neither is there any reference to the release of Southampton, or the peaceful opening of the reign of James.

I do not pretend to have removed all possible doubt as to the interpretation of this sonnet, and certainly lines 8 and 9 may be significant; but I think it will be admitted that the arguments against 1603 are stronger than any that may be adduced in favour of that date.

A few words may be added on the style

and subject-matter of the Sonnets in their relation to Shakespeare's other writings that appeared before 1600. We begin with the *Venus* of 1594, and the *Lucrece* of 1595, which are closely related to the sonnets in respect of manner, matter and form. Next, of the plays, the correspondences presented by *Love's Labour's Lost* are by far the most numerous and the most striking. This might be seen by a mere glance at the parallel passages collected by Professor Charles Flint McClumpha, but the corroborative evidence of this play (including the earlier draft, which may date back to 1591) has already been dwelt upon. Other plays that claim kinship with the sonnets are dated earlier than 1597. The only play of a later—but not much later¹—date that contains any striking resemblances is *Henry IV*, and of this I need only add that the play was at least as likely to borrow from the Sonnets as the Sonnets from the play. Finally, we have again to remember that these poems may have been

¹ The First Part of *Henry IV* was published in 1597–8, and the Second Part was probably completed a little later; and both parts may have been on the stocks for two or three years.

subject to revision up to 1609. Altogether, therefore, we may reasonably admit the limiting dates of original composition to have been 1594 and 1597.

As to the question whether Shakespeare was likely to write sonnets, intermittent or continuous, after 1597, when the sonnet craze was well-nigh over, I do not think it was likely. If we may trust his own words (and he gave expression to the feeling more than once) he disliked if not the sonnet form and manner of verse, certainly the sonnet vogue. Further, what may be called his lyric period ended about this time, and his rhyming efforts (which were never his best work) were reserved for songs and a few dramatic pentameters.

It will help us in our examination of this important question of date if we glance for a moment at the style of the sonnets. They are in Shakespeare's earlier manner—most of them, at least—the manner that underwent a marked change about the year 1600. And as to revision, there is no doubt that he improved some of them after 1597, especially those earliest written, and of his methods of

improving we have noted some instructive examples. They are radical in regard to incident, subtle in regard to expression. And from internal evidence we may suppose that he intended to publish, but the same evidence forbids us to infer that he superintended the publication of 1609.¹ It is more than probable that he would have arranged his sonnets in a different order.² I also think that he would have made

¹ Mr. Beeching's edition of the Sonnets, page lxiii.

² For example, with the sonnets as at present arranged, references to the unknown friend (always hard to reconcile) are a veritable see-saw : "Not acquainted with shifting change"; "He was but one hour mine"; "Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief"; "I take all comfort of thy worth and truth," "Lascivious grace—thy straying youth"; "Blessed is your worthiness"; "None like you for constant heart"; "Self-doing crime"; Fair heart, foul dress, questionable company; "A pure unstained prime"; "Thou hast pass'd by the ambush of young days, Either not assail'd, or victor being charged"; "You are fond of praise"; "Forsworn"; Only the constant should possess beauty, you are a tainted lily; "In what sweets dost thou thy sins enclose"; "Truth in beauty"; "Fair, kind, and true"; "My Saint." Was it Shakespeare's intention to arrange these sonnets as a hundred and a half-hundred—perhaps to publish them with titles—or to combine them in smaller groups?

further improvements, and perhaps some omissions.

For if we ask, “What is the literary quality of these sonnets as published? Are they as a whole splendid in their poetry and terrible in their sincerity, or are they mere exercises?” “As a whole,” we reply, “they are neither.” Yet again, if we must speak of them collectively, I believe their most enthusiastic admirer will allow that their leading quality is an astonishing and untiring ingenuity.¹ Taken as a whole, they are more clever than inspired, more ingenious and recondite than sincere. Or thus, if we put in one scale of a balance affectations, hyperboles, freaks of artifice, all that is

¹ Of course, we always postulate for Shakespeare a poetic supremacy, whether as regards originality or resource. The reservation made, we may note that this ingenuity is twofold; it is discovered not only by word work (or word play), but also in respect of subject matter. There are no fewer than fourteen sonnets, to begin with, on the one theme, “Your beauty deserves to be perpetuated by children.” And is it not a wearisome convention, this worship of a man’s beauty? To select would be invidious, but of too many of these sonnets the reader is compelled to ask himself: “Is this the prompting of the heart or of convention?”

comprehended in the term "conceits,"¹ and in the other the qualities of naturalness, fine taste, and fine imagination, the former scale will be the heavier. Too rare is the utterance of passionate love, passionate despair, or passionate anything. One is bound to respect the opinion of Wordsworth : "There is not a part of the writings of this great poet where is found in an equal compass a greater number of exquisite feelings felicitously expressed"; but I venture to think that the rhyme play itself tells against any such estimate. As a whole, the sonnets are scarcely great enough for the Shakespeare of the *Merchant of Venice*, certainly not for the Shakespeare of *Hamlet*, and they are worlds away from the Shakespeare of *Othello* or *Antony and Cleopatra*. At their best they never reach that finish or that height, and at their worst they sink below the *Venus* and the *Lucrece*. Again, therefore, as regards date, their manner helps us to assign them to the years before 1600, or more probably before 1598.

¹ Almost as "conventional" as the sonnet from itself.

But from the manner of the sonnets we learn yet more. It is such, I believe, that we can seldom distinguish between the frank personality and the conventional pose; we can never be sure of them. I will again quote Davidson: "The meaning of much of it can only be guessed at." That is perfectly true, and we must submit to the fact. But this artificiality or insincerity, or at least ambiguity, is due certainly in part to the verse and its vogue. Ambiguity in the sonnet utterance is by no means peculiar to Shakespeare, who himself complains of having to keep his "invention in a noted weed." Let us appeal, for instance, to Spenser, who also allowed himself to "sport" his "Muse" in the "pleasant mew" of the sonnet; and as an example of the hazy atmosphere that involves most sonnet sequences, we need only contrast Spenser's "Sweete Conceited Sonets," the shadowy and confusing and inventive *Amoretti*, with the crystal clearness, and the sacred truth of the *Epithalamium*. One line of this poem is worth all the *Amoretti*. And now, returning to Shakespeare, I may be in error, yet to

my thinking, one remark of Hamlet to Horatio, one murmur of love on the lips of Viola, one cry of passion and of pain from the torn heart of Othello, is worth all the ambiguity of the *Sonnets*.

It will be noted that this is no disparagement of Shakespeare. To blame his work would be as idle as to praise it. My criticism is restricted to comparisons among his own productions. He is Shakespeare even when he "turns sonnet,"¹ and is as much superior to his contemporaries in this vein as in his dramas.

But there is another aspect of these sonnets which, so far as I am aware, remains almost unnoticed.² Even if we admit the general fact that Shakespeare in his wilder days³ sinned according to the flesh, so shall we be compelled to admit that he repented according to the spirit. In other words, and however much the phrase may startle our more

¹ *Love's Labour's Lost*, I. ii. 190.

² It does not, for example, appear in our modern stage travesties of Shakespeare's life.

³ "How he comes o'er us with our wilder days,
Not measuring the use we made of them."

Henry V, I. ii. 278.

enlightened atheism, he was a “God-fearing Christian”; at least, he accepted the standard theology of his day. This, I believe, is by far the clearest fact that can be discerned amid the obscurity of his sonnets, and, as far as I can discover, it is almost the only thing that we do not find in other sonnet sequences of the time. The subject, however, is important enough to be dealt with in a separate essay.

II

SHAKESPEARE'S TESTAMENT

IN trying to get at the personality of Shakespeare we are surrounded by difficulties, one of which, as I venture to believe, is the danger of indiscriminate quotation. It will be the purpose of this essay to show how the danger may be lessened, if not altogether overcome.

The difficulty has been noticed by Shakespeare himself: "The devil can cite scripture for his purpose." If, for instance, I quote Shakespeare on the side of a beneficent Providence, as opposed to a malignant or a careless Fate, I am met by two objections. The first is that the dramatist puts all these opinions into the mouth of some character to whom alone they are appropriate, and from this follows the second objection, that we may expect to

hear some other character say just the opposite.¹

For example, if I cite Cassius (*Julius Cæsar*, I. ii. 14)—

“The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,

But in ourselves that we are underlings,”

I am confronted by Kent (*King Lear*, iv. iii. 34–37)— “It is the stars,

The stars above us govern our conditions ;
Else one self mate and mate could not
beget

Such different issues.”

Is Shakespeare, therefore, never to be quoted ? Or is there some principle that may guide us in quoting ? Certainly, I reply, there are many such principles. Let me illustrate one of these from the case of Tennyson. We will assume that his habits of thought, apart from his printed work, are unknown to us. Then, against the quotation, “Man is man, and master of his fate,” which is spoken by the character Elaine, we have to place the words spoken by another

¹ We shall have to notice a third case, that, namely, wherein a character contradicts himself.

character, " Man can half control his doom," or again, a degree lower in the moral scale, " We are puppets, man in his pride, and beauty fair in her flower." Now, whether we knew anything or not of the man Tennyson, we could get at the balance, as I may call it, of these quotations, from our general knowledge of his printed work. We should find that the prevailing and ultimate tendency of his thought is on the side of free will and moral responsibility, and that for one expression of doubt he will give us a hundred of high conviction—

" Ill for him who, bettering not with time,
Corrupts the strength of heaven-
descended will." " All

Life needs for life is possible to will. . . ."

" And breasts the blows of circumstance,
And grapples with his evil star ;
Who makes by force his merit known."

Yet more important are the following—

(a) " One that with us works." (See *In Memoriam*, xxxi.)

(b) " Our wills are ours to make them thine."

In other words, he is on the side of the current morality of his day: (a) " It is God

that worketh in you . . .” (b) “Work out your own salvation.”

Similarly with Shakespeare, we might begin and end our citations with those opposite poles of opinion about the influence of the stars which I have given already, and then the midway current of thought, or Tennyson’s “half control,” would be represented by—

“ Men at some time are masters of their fates ”;

and finally, as the exact counterpart of Tennyson’s ultimate and highest morality, viz. “One that with us works,” we have in Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, v. ii. 10)—

“ There ’s a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough-hew them how we will,”

or more explicitly, as thus—

“ The faults too often in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to heaven ; the fated
sky
Gives us free scope, only doth backward
pull
Our slow designs, when we ourselves are
dull.”

All's Well, i. i. 232-5.

And I believe that before we reach the end of our essay we shall be inclined to admit that this is the prevailing and the ultimate tendency of Shakespeare's moral philosophy, and therefore may serve us as a leading principle of quotation. We shall also find that it rests on the loftiest morality of his day, which again comprehended a belief in Providence, free will, and moral responsibility.

One note more. There are doubtless times when the best of us seek refuge in Tennyson's "half control," or even in his "puppets," but these best will always recover, and with a sense of past degradation. Among them, I believe (it will become clearer as we proceed), was Shakespeare. Let us then apply our principles to this great poet, and quote with insight and to good purpose. Let us ask, "What is his general mental and moral drift as we discover it from a complete survey of his work?" Let us put in one scale what he says of human helplessness and crime and misery, and in the other all that he tells us of manly and successful effort and goodness and happiness, and which scale will be the heavier? Surely the most

zealous of the critics who would make him vicious and a weakling, a fatalist and a pessimist, would answer, "The latter." The mere fact that he never scoffs at goodness, and that he never allows evil to go unpunished, is quite enough to turn the scale. Let us remember, once more, that like all of us he had his moments of depression, but good sense and moral determination prevailed with him in the long run. Let us remember, moreover, that in the general light of life we take special note of occasional gloom ; we hear of vice where virtue is silent and unregarded. We are apt, for example, to condemn marriage because of the Divorce Courts. On the other hand, when our friend whom we know to be right-minded and stout-hearted says, "I feel as though I should like to put an end to myself," we do not take him seriously ; we are sure that an hour or two later we shall be hearing his "Thank God for a good dinner," which comes from his prevailing habit of mind. So it is with me when I read or quote Shakespeare. But to be more exact, I will mention one or two examples of quotations from Shakespeare

which leave us with an impression that is perhaps far away from the truth ; at least, in conformity with the principle stated above, I will bring forward counter quotations which will be acknowledged as overwhelmingly the stronger.

In his *Study of Shakespeare*, Mr. Swinburne writes thus of *King Lear* : “ In one main point it differs radically from the work and the spirit of Aschylus. Its fatalism is of a darker and harder nature. To Prometheus the fetters of the lord and enemy of mankind were bitter ; upon Orestes the hand of heaven was laid too heavily to bear, yet in the not utterly infinite or everlasting distance we see beyond them the promise of the morning on which mystery and justice shall be made one ; when righteousness and omnipotence at last shall kiss each other. But on the horizon of Shakespeare’s tragic fatalism we see no such twilight of atonement, such pledge of reconciliation as this. Requital, redemption, amends, equity, explanation, pity and mercy are words without a meaning here—

“ ‘As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods ;
They kill us for their sport.’

Here is no need of the Eumenides, children of Night everlasting ; for here is very Night herself. The words just cited are not casual or episodical ; they strike the keynote of the whole poem, lay the keystone of the whole arch of thought."

It will be seen in the foregoing that the writer's opinion of *King Lear* is illustrated and as it seems borne out by a quotation¹ from the play, and unless we look further the impression left on our minds is that Shakespeare was undeniably a fatalist and a pessimist. But a closer examination of the text will reveal something totally different, the mere weight of quotation easily turns the scale in favour of what some have regarded as nobler convictions—

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
 Make instruments to plague us."²

Or again—

"This judgment of the heavens, that
 makes us tremble,
 Touches us not with pity" (v. iii. 231-2)

¹ Suetonius tells us that Domitian was accustomed "muscas captare ac stilo praeacuto configere."

² This comes later in the play (v. iii. 170-1), and may read as a recantation.

Which means, “ Even with our mortal sight,
and while we tremble, we recognise the stern
but righteous judgment of Providence.”¹
Similar to this is the confession (iv. ii.
78–81)—

“ This shows you are above,
You justicers, that these our nether
crimes
So speedily can venge ! ”²

Or Mr. Swinburne might have quoted a different faith from the lips of the same speaker (Kent)—

“ The gods to their dear shelter take thee,
maid.”

¹ Contrast this with—

“ Their story is
No less in pity than his glory which
Brought them to be lamented.”

Antony and Cleopatra, v. ii. 358–60.

See, however, for the former quotation, Mr. Churton Collins’s *Studies of Shakespeare*.

² With this we may compare—

“ The high gods,
To do you justice, make them ministers
Of us and those that love you.”

Antony and Cleopatra, III. vi. 87–90.

Similar again, in tenor, are the words of Gloucester (iv. i. 69-74)—

“ Heavens, deal so still !
Let the superfluous and lust-dited
man
That slaves your ordinance, that will not
see
Because he doth not feel, feel your power
quickly.”

But we have not by any means exhausted the speeches that deal with requital, equity, explanation, and yet more of those ideas that Mr. Swinburne could find no place for in *King Lear*, and I will add one other. When Gloucester (i. ii. 112) complains of the direful influence of eclipses, and that “ though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects,” Edmund says the last word, and a very definite one—“ This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune—often the surfeit of our own behaviour—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars : as if we were villains by necessity ; fools by heavenly

compulsion ; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance ; drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence ; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on : an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star ! ” But what the play of *King Lear* can further teach us respecting “ redemption, amends, pity, and mercy,” which Mr. Swinburne excludes, I must endeavour to explain in another essay. Meanwhile, I will select one other illustration of my point.

On p. 159 of his *Shakespeare*, Sir Walter Raleigh writes : “ In a sense . . . they too, like the tragic heroes and heroines, are the antagonists of Fate. But Fate, in the realm of Comedy, appears in the milder and more capricious character of Fortune, whose wheel turns and turns again, and vindicates the merry heart. ‘ Who can control his Fate ? ’ says Othello. ‘ ‘Tis but Fortune ; all is Fortune,’ says Malvolio, when he believes himself to stand in favour with Olivia ; ‘ Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked.’ Olivia, ensnared by the beauty

of the disguised Viola, gives voice to the same creed :—

“ ‘ I do I know not what, and fear to find
Mine eye too great a flatterer for my
mind :
Fate, show thy force ; ourselves we do
not owe ;
What is decreed, must be ; and be this
so.’ ,

And Viola, in like fashion, trusts to the event :—

“ ‘ O Time, thou must untangle this, not I ;
It is too hard a knot for me to untie.’

The impulses and passions that shape man’s life to happy or unhappy ends seem to owe their power to something greater than man, and refuse his control.”

Here the plays illustrated by quotations are a comedy and a tragedy, *Twelfth Night* and *Othello*, and the quotations are intended to enforce the writer’s opinion that Fortune is the ruling power in Shakespeare’s comedy, and Fate is his tragedy. And yet, in order to question this opinion, we shall not find it necessary to call upon any plays beyond

these two, and we begin with *Twelfth Night*. And first we examine Malvolio's remark.

It seems probable that his "all is fortune" is a proverbial expression, which we shall find again in *The Tempest*; that he is "a kind of Puritan," and that in deference to the statute of James I against profanation, he had to change his Biblical "this is God's doing" to "this is Jove's doing."¹ So also in a former part of his speech he says, "I have limed her; but it is Jove's doing, and Jove make me thankful." What the poet here intends is to make the character grotesque by his manner of thanking God in Biblical phrase for some very carnally-minded achievement.

Next Olivia. In III. iv. 211 we read—

"There's something in me that reproves
my fault,"

where she seems to confess that she does "owe herself"; that she has a conscience, to which she is disobedient. Or, descending

¹ According to some critics, this substitution of *Jove* for *God* appears to have been made throughout the play.

to lower ground, we may hear her assert—

“ O well for him, whose will is strong,”
as thus—

“ Be that thou know’st thou art, and then
thou art
As great as that thou fear’st.”

And as to Viola, she is not always disposed to leave everything to time, not even the desperation of rejected love—

“ Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon your soul within the
house . . .

O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth
But you should pity me.”

Yet more pertinent is the most famous utterance of the whole play : “ Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.”

“ Some achieve greatness.” In Milton it reads thus—

“ To persevere

He left it in thy power ; ordained thy will
By nature free, not over-ruled by fate.”¹

¹ This is not the place to examine the difficulty of free will. I will only venture to add that, in my judgment, all recent discussion still leaves the question to be answered by intuition, rather than by reason.

Far more important, however, to our purpose is the rebutting testimony, the burning and the shining light, that is to be seen in Shakespeare's tragedies, their "light of revelation," as opposed to what Mr. Swinburne has called their "darkness of revelation"; even through *Othello*, which I regard as the darkest, that light never ceases to glimmer. We begin with *Othello* himself—

"Let's teach ourselves that honourable
stop
Not to outsport discretion";

in other words, *Let us control our fate!* and because Cassio did not choose to control his fate he suffered rebuke. Indeed, he rebukes himself: "I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. . . . That we should with joy, pleasance, revel and applause *transform ourselves* into beasts!"

And he has small comfort from Iago's, "Come, come, good wine is a good familiar creature, if it be well used."

But apart from all this, we find in *Othello* (1. iii. 329–36) a declaration of morals as

definite and pronounced as that in *King Lear*. It reads as follows—

“ ‘Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners ; so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills.”

In all this it will be observed we have an exact parallel to Tennyson, and once more discover that the prevailing habit of Shakespeare’s thought is not by any means in favour of “ Fortune ” and “ Fate,” but of Providence and moral responsibility, and “ The strength of heaven-descended will.”

And finally, if our attention is fastened on a single play somewhere between *Henry V* and *The Tempest*, let us, if we feel that the play reflects some darker mood, remember our first principle, and turn upon it the bright and redeeming light of other plays ; and especially of the two above mentioned, those

wonderful triumphs of manly courage and virtue.

Another important consideration, and one that so far as I am aware has not been sufficiently urged, is the fact that Shakespeare has a curious knowledge of the Bible, a profound respect for its teaching, and a habit of using its language with a high moral purpose. He knew nothing of the modern base use of what was then a holy book,¹ nothing of our modern trading with its picturesque phrases and Gregorian melodies as mere literary catch-pennies ; those were the days before Voltairian ridicule or our latter day pilfering and blasphemy ;² with Shakespeare it was far otherwise. I will take two examples, one from the play I have already chosen to

¹ I will quote from the chief representative of Elizabethan thought : " Sacred and inspired divinity . . . grounded only upon the word and oracle of God, and not upon the light of nature . . . *Nec vox hominem sonat* ; it is a voice beyond the light of nature."

Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, II. xxiv. xxv.

² It will be understood that I make no apology for the Bible, or its morality. I only mention that it had a vast moral influence over Shakespeare and some of his contemporaries—a direct influence. Its influence on Tennyson and his day was, by comparison, indirect and reflex.

illustrate these principles of quotation. In *King Lear* (v. iii. 20) we have the memorable passage—

“ Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense,”

which is a blending of the two Biblical texts : “ That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service,” and “ for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”¹

The other example is from the play with which I am chiefly concerned in these essays, namely *Hamlet*. I choose the well-known

¹ I think that a consideration of Shakespeare's methods may justify this example ; but of course there are thousands of others of easier attestation. And here I may quote Dr. A. C. Bradley : “ Biblical ideas seem to have been floating in Shakespeare's mind. Cf. the words of Kent, when Lear enters with Cordelia's body : ‘ Is this the promised end ? ’ and Edgar's answer : ‘ Or image of that horror ? ’ The ‘ promised end ’ is certainly the end of the world (cf. with ‘ image ’ ‘ the great doom's image,’ *Macbeth*, III. iii. 83). It seems probable that in writing Glo'ster's speech about the predicted horrors to follow ‘ these late eclipses,’ Shakespeare had a vague recollection of the passage in *Matthew* xxiv. or in that of *Mark* xiii. about the tribulations which were to be the sign of the end of the world.”—*Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 328.

"There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow," which is an adaptation of the Bible text: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and yet one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father."

Bearing in mind, then, the foregoing principles, and especially the fact that even poets will emphasise the partial evil that seems to disturb the general good, and that we may expect apter and more numerous citations on the darker side, considering, moreover, the enormous variety and scope of Shakespeare's work, we may admit that the claim of good is respected by him with an unusual liberality, and that we may quote him on that side perhaps more faithfully than on the other.

But there is yet, as I think, a more important and a more convincing consideration to guide us, and one that bears closely on the former. Most modern poets leave us somewhere or other a confession of their faith, personal and undramatic, which may enlighten us when we are in doubt about a quotation, or remind us of a tendency, or serve as a general guide in the whole matter.

I have chanced to mention Tennyson and Swinburne ; in these poets we have such a clue or cue, and it serves us well ; and as it happens, we have from the lips of the dramatist Shakespeare a confession of faith as undramatic and explicit and genuine as any of theirs, so full, indeed, and so sufficient that in all reason we could not possibly expect more, nor even desire it. I refer, of course, to the Sonnets ; and if we ask why the biographical evidence of these poems on the moral and spiritual side has been persistently neglected, the answer may be found in our tendency to discover in Shakespeare only what it pleases us to discover. It pleases the modern mind to discover that Shakespeare was a libertine ; to believe that the great artist, emancipated from the superstitions of religion, was indifferent to the appeal of conscience,¹ the claims of morality, the high

¹ Of the remarkable and somewhat difficult sonnet, "Conscience is born of Love" (151), I venture to suggest the following as a prose rendering—

"Love's first impulse has no hought of conscience, but as passion gets its will, conscience awakes. Therefore, O paramour, taunt me not with this sin of love, for it was you who made me

purpose of the soul, and the infinite and most sacred possibilities of existence. He was not. He was, I believe, religious; so also were Bacon and Spenser, and a score of the great souls of that great day. Certainly he was no saint, nor was Bacon, nor Spenser;² but he did not scoff at saintliness as we do. That is the difference, the inestimable difference. We moderns have great wit, but little wisdom; we forget that all true knowledge begins in humility,³ and ends in reverence;⁴ that all

love, and by this love of the body I am a traitor to my soul. It is the doctrine of my soul that the body may rise to higher things on the wings of true love. My quick flesh takes the hint, and points to you as the love that should raise it. Deceived by this false pride, I remain your drudge, a slave to your interests, determined to fall with you. It can be no lack of conscience when I call you love, for if at first your love seemed to raise me, now I confess that it drags me in its fall."

² "Many lewd layes (ah! woe is me the more!)

In praise of that mad fit which fools call
love
I have in th' heat of youth made heretofore."

Hymn of Heavenly Love.

³ "There are more things in heaven and earth,
Horatio,

Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

⁴ "What should such fellows as I do crawling
between earth and heaven?
. . . As for me, I 'll go pray."

true art begins in aspiration,¹ and ends in spirituality;² that all true spiritual life begins in confession, and ends in repentance.³ This Shakespeare did not forget. But we will decline the evidence of the drama, for his conviction with respect to the last of these is, as we have said in our former essay, the clearest fact that can be discovered amid the obscurity of his sonnets—

“ I do betray
My nobler part to my gross body's
treason.”—Sonnet 151.

But confession implies repentance, and if we seek an *Envoi* to the sonnets, let it be the repentant cry and the lofty and firm resolve of the whole of Sonnet 146—

¹ “ The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth
to heaven.”

² “ And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I 'll drown my book . . . ”
“ Every third thought shall be my grave.”

³ “ Confess yourself to heaven ;
Repent what 's past, avoid what is to
come.”

“ Whose wraths to guard you from
. . . is nothing but heart sorrow
And a clear life ensuing.”

“ Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
¹ Lord of } these rebel powers that thee-
 Thrall to } array,
 Why dost thou pine within and suffer
 dearth,
 Painting thy outward walls so costly gay ?
 Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
 Dost thou upon thy fading mansion
 spend ?
 Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
 Eat up thy charge ? Is this thy body's
 end ?
 Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's
 loss,
 And let that pine to aggravate thy store,
 Buy terms divine in selling hours of
 dross ;
 Within be fed, without be rich no more :
 So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds
 on men,
 And Death once dead, there's no more
 dying then.” ²

¹ Suggested readings ; but the soul is mostly feminine. See *Lucrece* 715-728, where also “ thrall ” occurs.

² It is most instructive to refer to a doctrine opposed to this Sonnet, expressed by a character whom Shakespeare sternly rebukes.—See *Measure for Measure*, v. l. 485-7.

“ Thou art said to have a stubborn soul
 That apprehends no further than this world,
 And squarest thy life according.”

Here certainly we have the most personal, as it is also the deepest, of all the utterances of Shakespeare, coming from what he calls in *Hamlet* "my very soul"; and if, I repeat, it has a tone of repentance, and is meant to be an Epilogue to the sonnets, it gains a yet deeper significance. In fact, its fourteen lines are an exact epitome of the Biblical yet lofty morality of Shakespeare's own time, the epoch of Sidney and Spenser, and Raleigh and Bacon; and Spenser he probably knew and respected.¹

¹ It may not be out of place to add from these four writers a few words of like tenor with Shakespeare's sonnet—

"Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust,

And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things;
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust;
And think how ill becometh him to slide
Who seeketh Heaven, and comes of heavenly breath." SIDNEY.

"Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,

And love of things so vaine to cast away . . .
But thence-forth all shall rest eternally
With Him that is the God of Sabaoth hight." SPENSER.

"My soul, like quiet palmer,
Travelleth toward the land of Heaven . . .
No stab the soul can kill." RALEIGH.

"In knowledge man's mind suffereth from sense;

This sonnet, therefore, in the matter of quotation, must be our final reference, and give the casting vote. To illustrate my point I will choose two examples from a very large number.

First, the much-quoted words from *The Tempest*—

“ Every third thought shall be my grave,” which we shrink from recognising as the voice of Shakespeare, are repeated in this sonnet—

“ Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross . . .

So shalt thou feed on death that feeds on men.”

And since it is my purpose to exhibit Shakespeare’s thought in the light of his own day, I may add one or two references from his contemporaries—

“ All that pompe to which proud minds aspyre . . .

Seems to them basenesse, and all riches drosse . . .

but in belief it suffereth from spirit, such one as it holdeth for more authorised than itself, and so suffereth from the worthier agent. Otherwise, it is of the state of man glorified ; for then faith shall cease, and we shall know as we are known.”

BACON, *Advancement of Learning*.

Ne from henceforth doth any fleshly
sense
Or idle thought of earthly things,
remaine." SPENSER.

" Of death and judgment, heaven and hell,
 Who oft doth think must needs die well."

RALEIGH.

"The contemplation of death, as the wages of sin, and passage to another world, is holy and religious?" BACON.

Again, in *The Merchant of Venice* occurs the following—

" Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear
it."

And if we ask, as we naturally do, "Did Shakespeare, as we read in *Twelfth Night*, 'think nobly of the soul,' did he believe in immortality, did he accept the Bible doctrine of a 'vile body' and an undying spirit?" — to answer such questions we need only refer to this sonnet, where along with other tenets of Christianity we find these doctrines both emphasised and amplified. And although Shakespeare has not solved all the problems

of our being, and although we who are so much wiser than our sires may be inclined to laugh at the limitations of his philosophy, we must yet remember that *we want to get his opinion and not ours*; we must also remember the prevailing opinion of his day, and in all cases of doubt we must refer to his deliberate confession of these opinions, which are comprehended in this sonnet, and in what used to be called “the Christian Faith.”

III

SHAKESPEARE ON THE DRAMA

WHENEVER we try to discover Shakespeare in his writings, we are beset by dangers, not the least of which is the possibility of a wrong interpretation ; this, however, as I believe, may often be lessened by a careful attention to motive and context and possible source. In the following essay I will endeavour to illustrate the point with the aid of two well-known passages that also bring us near to the personality of Shakespeare ; for they embody his own opinions of the art to which his life was devoted. Moreover, I take them as types, and may therefore be pardoned if I deal with them at some length.¹

¹ Now that controversy rages round the personality and opinions of the great dramatist, whatever he says as for himself should be carefully examined.

As brief quotations they read thus :—
(a) “ ‘Twas caviare to the general.” (b) “ To hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature.’” Nothing, perhaps, in Shakespeare is so constantly quoted as the second of these, and nothing, perhaps, so wrongly interpreted ; but the first quotation includes far more than is discovered by a hasty reading.

I will now add the passages in which these quotations occur ; so much, at least, of the context must be present to us throughout :—

(a) “ I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted ; or, if it was, not above once ; for the play, I remember, pleased not the million ; *‘twas caviare to the general* ; but it was—as I received it, and others, whose judgments in such matters cried in the top of mine—an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning. I remember, one said there were no sallets in the lines to make the matter savoury, nor no matter in the phrase that might indict the author of affectation : but called it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine. One speech in it I chiefly loved . . . ” *Hamlet* II. ii. 451-468.

(b) "With this special observance, that you o'er-step not the modesty of nature ; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, *to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature* ; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." *Hamlet* III. ii. 21-29.

It will be seen that these two passages refer (a) to the drama, (b) to its representation ; but as a preliminary remark I should point out that in Shakespeare's day the drama and its performance were more closely associated than they are now ; *Hamlet* was written not for the library, but the stage ; and commonly enough, the word "actor" almost meant "drama." Remarks on the drama, therefore, will arise out of either passage. For example, in (b) the actors are said to show "the very age and body of the time," which is really the function of drama ; or again, they are "the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time."

This close connection between actor and drama may be learnt from other plays, as, for

example, *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*.

We now begin with the latter of these two passages ; but it is sometimes objected that this may be Hamlet's opinion and not Shakespeare's. Yet, if we take into account the awkward *intrusion* of the subject (II. ii. 324-340), the extent and the drift of these remarks on the drama, their personal and contemporary allusions, and the fact that similar remarks are found in other plays, we may, I think, rest assured that what we hear is the voice of Shakespeare. And surely it is a paradox to suppose that the greatest artist the world has seen should be ignorant of the principles of his art, or indifferent to them.

Johnson, for example, seems not to have realised the fact that Shakespeare was able to modify the classical traditions of drama, only because he had carefully studied those traditions ; and indeed Johnson significantly remarks, " His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy instinct." I take this to mean that Shakespeare learnt his trade by degrees, that he was a poet before he became an artist, and

not like Johnson, an artist before he became—or tried to become—a poet.¹

That Shakespeare was not a professed student was therefore almost certainly a benefit to him and to us. He kept his mind open from the first to the fresher impulses and changing conditions and more vital genius of his day. But although he began the “art and practic part” of his business with a minimum of “theoric,” and had to learn his craft while working at it, he was none the less a student—a student of books as well as of the world; and I have a suspicion that by the time he reached *Twelfth Night* he had found “Plautus too light”; that he had read and pondered some of the dramatic doctrines of Aristotle; that he also found “Seneca too heavy,” and that consciously or unconsciously he evolved a species of tragedy that may perhaps be described as a grafting of romance on the traditional stock—“more matter with less art”—“the law of writ and the liberty,” as we read in

¹ We might also say this of the Jonson without the “h.” We have too much art and too little poetry in *Sejanus* or *Irene*.

Hamlet, II. ii. 421. And how skilfully in this play the poet bids farewell (it may be with a certain reluctance) to such types of drama as recalled his earlier days, the rhymeless and turgid but forceful manner of the Hecuba speech, and the rhyming, weaker style of the " Mousetrap,"¹ while he completes the play with something far better than either. And it was natural that with Aristotle (and perhaps others) in mind, he should, after the experiment of *Julius Cæsar*, wish to have a talk with his audience in the play that further embodies several hints traceable to the Greek critic,² some also to other writers. And in this passage, the words " both at the first and now, was and is " (which of themselves might prove conclusively that Shakespeare speaks for himself) refer us to the authority of the

¹ Though certainly this measure appears elsewhere, e.g. in *The Tempest*.

² Apart from the opinion of Mr. Churton Collins, my belief in the influence of Aristotle has been supported by Mr. Beeching (*19th Century*, April, 1910), where he writes: "It is my private belief, which cannot of course be proved any more than it can be disproved, that Shakespeare had come across this dictum in some translation of Aristotle."

past.¹ They correspond, indeed, to Bacon's (on the drama, *De Augmentis*) "apud antiquos curae fuit, ut animos hominum ad virtutem institueret . . . disciplina plane nostris temporibus est neglecta."

This will be made clearer as we proceed to examine the context, and note the general tenor of Shakespeare's dissertation, to which, as a commentator has suggested,² we have another parallel in Cervantes. We read (*Don Quixote*, Book I. Ch. iv. 48) : "Though the drama according to Cicero³ ought to be the mirror of human life, an exemplar of manners, and an image of truth, those which are now produced are mirrors of inconsistency patterns of folly, and images of licentious-

¹ As a fact, in *Hamlet* and elsewhere, Shakespeare has contrived, though a dramatist, to express an opinion on almost every aspect of poetry and the drama, and in nine cases out of ten we can trace it to some Greek or Latin writer, e.g. "Scene indivisible, or poem unlimited," *Hamlet*, II. ii. 418.

² Silberschlag (quoted by Furness). The parallel, I believe, was pointed out by others.

³ This occurs in the *Fragmenta* : "Comœdia est imitatio vitæ, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis." Rendered thus (in Tudor translation of *Don Quixote*) : "The Comedie as Tully affirmes, ought to be a mirrour of man's life, a patterne of manners, and an image of truth."

ness." The writer calls for nature in drama, as opposed to extravagance and improbability, and adds, "The spectator of a good drama is . . . incensed against vice, stimulated to the love of virtue." Like Bacon and Cervantes, Shakespeare seems to contrast the earlier influence and repute of the drama with a modern degeneracy. Cervantes writes further, "The actor and the author both say that they must please the people, and not produce compositions that can only be appreciated by half a score of men of sense."

This takes us to the other passage in *Hamlet*, of which the following would be a paraphrase: "The play was never popular, it was too delicate a dish for the general public; but in my opinion, and that of others better qualified to judge, it was an excellent play, constructed with great skill, and written with as much good taste as genius. Bearing out this, someone remarked that there was no spice of licentiousness¹ in the matter of it, and nothing affected in the language and

¹ "Piquant indecencies," Bradley; "Spicy epigrams," Lee; "Spicy improprieties," Dowden.

style ; that it was pleasing although pure, and more beautiful than showy.”¹

This interpretation is based on the following analysis of the text. Even prose in Shakespeare wants careful scrutiny. We have to follow the double course of thought from “modesty” and “cunning.” It may be thus indicated, “Modesty . . . no sallets . . . honest, and wholesome as sweet.” Similarly we have “cunning . . . no affectation . . . more handsome than fine.” Thus we get at the full meaning of the two leading words, and “modesty” is seen to preserve much of its usual sense, as in “blurs the grace and blush of modesty.” In the other passage (“modesty of nature”) it has more of the old sense of “moderation.”

Apparently, therefore, we have in this passage (and, as we shall see, in the other also) a hint of the kind of drama that came nearest

¹ There is no room here to discuss the question whether this “one speech in it I chiefly loved” (or the conjectured play) is to be taken seriously. I can only repeat a former remark (p. 98), and record my opinion that Shakespeare is in earnest. It may be a fragment of earlier work, which he was at no pains to alter or amend. I have somewhere noted that although Shakespeare laughs at Euphuism, he can be an arrant Euphuist.

to Shakespeare's heart—something purer, more refined and more artistic—"caviare to the general."

This interpretation is borne out by the remarks of Polonius, who, as we may suppose, represents the popular and degraded taste. In his opinion, the speech from this "excellent play" is too long. He lacks taste and patience to listen to the "honest method" which to him is *caviare*. No lady speaks her mind freely. "He 's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps."¹

We may notice, however, that this higher drama seems free from the elements of satire and controversy and personal abuse referred to in other plays besides *Hamlet*, and complained of by Bacon and Cervantes, elements that most of all, as we must imagine, made the ill report of the players worse than a bad epitaph. Finally, all that is said by

¹ In "mobled Queen," which Hamlet questions, perhaps intentionally, Polonius seems to find a meaning unknown to us, and it may be more suited to his taste. This condemnation of Polonius is but one small item in the vast mass of testimony that rebuts such estimates of Shakespeare as describe him "of free manners and morals," and given over to sensuality.

Shakespeare in praise of this loftier style of play turns also to condemnation of the more degraded but popular methods. Once more, Shakespeare's plea here, and I think also in the "mirror" passage is, like that of Bacon and Cervantes, for something cleaner and saner in drama.

Such drama, perhaps, as might arouse "pity and fear," and "purify the emotions." But this must be explained later. And meanwhile we return to our first passage, and proceed with our elucidation. First we examine the state of the text, and I agree with Johnson that the "age" of the "time" can hardly pass. I almost incline towards

¹ This may not be quite Aristotle's meaning, where he points to the influence of tragedy, but I use the interpretation which, as far as I can discover, commended itself to Elizabethans. Though a late instance, I may, perhaps, quote Milton (*Preface to Samson Agonistes*): "Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralst and most profitable of all other poems; therefore said by Aristotle to be of power, by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions—that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. Nor is Nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion; for so, in physic, things of melancholic

Bailey's proposal to read "visage" for "very age," and for more reasons than one.

First, as the text stands, in—

"And the very age and body of the time
His form and pressure. . . ."

we have (with or without the initial "and") a passage of blank verse in the midst of Shakespeare's prose. Such a blemish, for the most part, he carefully avoids. The other reading "visage" transforms the verse into good prose—the symmetrical prose dearest to Shakespeare. So here we have "virtue" corresponding to "feature," "scorn" to "image," "visage" to "form," and "body" to "pressure."

hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humours. Hence . . . Cicero, Plutarch and others frequently cite out of tragic poets . . . I may add that although I consider that Shakespeare's privilege in such matters is too exclusive, I have no wish to read Aristotle into him ; still, I find it impossible to believe that the greatest dramatist of them all, the friend of Jonson, should have remained ignorant of the popular traditions of the drama, especially those derived from Aristotle ; and I think the importance of the passages I am examining, together with Shakespeare's leading methods in tragedy, make some reference to Aristotle not only justified but also inevitable.

Next we bear it in mind that Shakespeare, at a given period or in a given composition, will often employ more than once some striking word or phrase or figure. It is thus with "visage," which occurs five times in this play, and now and then in a similar context. As we shall see later, other words in the passage that come within the same category are "mirror" and "form" and "pressure."¹

All this, however, is in the region of conjecture, and though worthy of consideration, in no way affects my main argument. "A mirror," says a recent critic, "should simply

¹ It is worth noticing that the word "visage" occurs with the word "forms" twice in this play, and we compare "forms and visages of duty" in *Othello*: so also, each time that it is employed, the rare word "pressure" is connected with "form" or "forms." Bailey, moreover, quotes "visage of the times" from *2 Henry IV*, II. iii. 3.

Besides all this, as the counterpart of "body" we might reasonably expect "head" or "face" or "visage"; so in another passage Hamlet is the "head" and the state is the "body"; again we have "devotion's visage and pious action," and "visage" with "solidity and compound mass." Thus also in our passage we have possibly the "visage" and its appearance or presentment, and the "body," and its impress or mould.

reflect the object"; but I shall endeavour to prove that this mirror does something more.

Now Shakespeare is by far the most original of all poets; nevertheless, as we have anticipated, whatever in his work calls for examination will almost certainly be traced to or illustrated by the past. So with this figure of a mirror. We begin with Aristotle, who records that "the *Odyssey* is a beautiful mirror of the life of man." The figure as repeated by Cicero has already been quoted, and it occurs more significantly in Terence and Plautus; and I shall try to make it evident that Shakespeare was indebted to some of these writers, especially to Plautus.

But before pointing out the classical antecedents of this famous passage, I should like to show that, independently of these, we might get at the right interpretation. It may be discovered, indeed, in many ways, any one of which would probably be convincing by itself, but for the fact that we are dealing with Shakespeare; and further, that the passage is so well known, and that we are

so accustomed to read it in what I must believe is the wrong sense. I shall, therefore, though as briefly as possible, bring forward all the available evidence.

In our literature, for example, a number of writers before Shakespeare, or contemporary with him, employ the figure of a mirror, and frequently as a title for poem or prose treatise, until it denotes far more than a reflecting medium, and often indeed implies a moral purpose. Already, therefore, apart from the context of our passage, and any possible Greek or Latin originals, we are disposed to look carefully at the figure as employed by Shakespeare, and we have a suspicion that there also the mirror will prove to be something more than a reflecting apparatus or instrument; that possibly it "discovers," enables us to see what we did not see before—that it idealises.

But before proceeding with the proof, we ask—perhaps inevitably—"Does any drama, or actor, or any art or artist, copy?" Turner had painted a sunset, and if I remember rightly some critic complained, "I never saw a sunset like that." "Don't

you wish you could ? " was the prompt rejoinder.

So we do not cover the walls of our Academy with photographs. Consciously or unconsciously, and whether he will or no, the artist must idealise. He must create. And least of all is the poet a photographer, or rather a photographic apparatus ; and least of all poets, was Shakespeare such ? More than any other he " bodies forth The forms of things unknown," and creates or idealises.¹

In *Hamlet*, for example, everything is ideal, or interpreted. The men and women talk mostly in blank verse, and sometimes a character will make a long speech to himself. Even natural scenery, as in the death of Ophelia, is used " unnaturally." No mother in real life would thus describe the death of her child.

Then we have a ghost, and glimpses of unseen worlds ; we have Pyrrhus and Priam and Hecuba. " What 's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba ? " " Everything to the purpose,

¹ For the idealising function of the actor, see the Hecuba speech and Hamlet's comment thereupon, and for the whole subject, Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1454b. 8.

whether to him or to Shakespeare, a pathetic ideal figure, aptly chosen by the dramatist, and further idealised by the actor," for thus we venture to reply. Then we have kings and queens and princes and courtiers, all servants to the ideal. Our prince, moreover, "a noble mind," "the mould of form," is ready to die for his "quantity of love," and for hers his lady dies twice, in mind and in body. That love must be without soil or cautel, and "flights of angels" will "sing" him to her who is already "a ministering angel," for the ideal marriage of such ideal love must be made in heaven.¹

And then we have deeds and thoughts, and emotions far beyond the common, the real, the "natural,"—"carnal, bloody and unnatural acts" all again pressed into the service of the ideal. We have the engineer hoist with his own petar, we have "purposes mistook Fall'n on the inventors' heads"—

¹ We are accustomed, I think, to underrate the love element in *Hamlet*. Let us try to realise what the play would be like without Hamlet as a lover, and without Ophelia. We should miss at least one half of the pathos and the poetry. What painter who records an impression of the play will not put Ophelia into his picture?

ideals of retribution. We have texts or proverbs (and plenty), “Man proposes, but God disposes,” translated into the language of the ideal: “Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.”

And lastly, the penalty paid by misdoing, mistake (and in the high cause of the ideal) by love,¹ is the distinctive penalty of all true tragedy, the symbolical, the ideal penalty of death. How much, we ask, now remains of what is generally understood by “nature”?

One other preliminary note. Is the nature that has to be thus idealised the nature of Fiji or Lampsacus, or of the age of Nero, or even of Pericles or Virgil? Where can we find in the best of Greek or Roman literature the words “virtue” and “scorn,” as they are here employed by Shakespeare? They belong to the England of Sidney and Spenser and Hooker and Bacon, and of the poet who wrote—

“Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth . . .
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross.”

¹ For an explanation, see Essay V, p. 199.

Next we might explain the words “virtue” and “scorn.” “Virtue” has first its ordinary meaning—“The rarer action is In virtue,” and “scorn” stands for the opposite of virtue, as “that which deserves scorn”—

“A fixed figure for the time of scorn,
To point his slow unmoving finger at.”

Othello, IV. ii. 54.

But the words may also represent those who have a “free” conscience as opposed to the “guilty” who are conscience-stricken, especially “at a play”: “We that have free souls, it touches us not” (III. ii. 252); “I have heard That guilty creatures sitting at a play” (II. ii. 618); “Make mad the guilty and appal the free” (II. ii. 590)—the free whose pity and fear are aroused by tragedy.¹

“Look,” said Polonius, “whether he has not turned his colour, and has tears in ‘s eyes. Prithee, no more,” for Polonius was past all such purification of the emotions.

Thus the words “virtue” and “scorn” may suggest the types of audience to whom

¹ See page 105, and footnote.

drama then appealed so powerfully. For we must remember that in Shakespeare's earlier and rougher day the emotions were perhaps keener and less controlled, and the nation was much " beholding " to poetry and the stage for moral " discipline." There were no novels, no newspapers, no Sunday Schools, no Board Schools. It would not be strange, therefore, if this dramatic purification of the emotions should now and then be present to Shakespeare. And Bacon, after pointing out the discipline of the drama, uses the significant phrase, " Plectrum amimorum."¹

" He would drown the stage with tears,
And cleave the general ear with horrid
speech,

Make mad the guilty, and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculty of eyes and ears."

Hamlet, II. ii. 588-592.

Then Bacon adds a curious note on the greater moral effect produced on men,

¹ " Call me what instrument you will," said Hamlet (III. ii. 388), " though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me."

Cf. " I would 'twere something that would fret the string, The master-cord on 's heart."—*Henry VIII*, III. ii. 105.

"Cum congregati sint, magis quam cum soli sint"; and elsewhere, following Aristotle, points out that the poet dramatist will "represent acts and events greater and more heroical," and therefore he "conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation . . . for the expressing of affections, passions, corruptions, and customs."

"O proud death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,
That thou so many princes at a shot
So bloodily hast struck? . . .
You that look pale and tremble at this
chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this
act."

Hamlet, v. ii. 376-8 and 344-5.

The drama, therefore, in its high purpose, sets before us those in high estate, and better secures its ideal and moral effect.

Of this purpose and effect we have a good illustration in *The Tempest*, a play that might almost have been written "to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image." Yet more, the play contains within it two minor plays, and the purpose of the first is to show

scorn her own image, to convince “ three men of sin,” and compel them to “ heart-sorrow, And a clear life ensuing,” and the second exhibition of the magician’s “ art ” (his “ glass ” shall we say), shows virtue her own feature. It upholds and praises virtue. No bed-right shall be paid, and Venus and her son and all their “ wanton charms ” are rendered powerless.

And now, as we return to our passage, we may discover that Shakespeare does three things ; that he puts before us the nature, the purpose, and the effect of dramatic representation. First, its material is nature —or rather man ; the actors are to “ imitate humanity ” ; they are the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time. They give us what Bacon calls “ visible history.”

This first aspect of drama as an “ imitative art ”¹ having been thus indicated, Shakespeare passes rapidly from the material to the manner of imitation or representation. We

¹ See Aristotle, *Poetics*, esp. 1449b. 24, and 1452b. 32.

We may perhaps quote “ The image of a murder done in Vienna ” (III. ii. 245), and also compare this with “ scorn her own image.”

achieve the ideal only by not over-straining to reveal. There must be no extravagance, no bombast, no parade: "Ars est celare artem"; art is achieved only by avoidance of artifice.

But Shakespeare intends to be more explicit, and he proceeds to indicate the purpose and the effect of playing. Like Aristotle and Cicero and Bacon, he has more to tell us about this "visible history." Like them, he does not intend an inartistic and inert photograph. The artist must be an interpreter and not a mere copyist.

Now, among principles that may guide us in interpretation, perhaps the most valuable are those we derive from the poet's literary habits. More than one of these are illustrated by our passage. It is quite in Shakespeare's practice to interpolate his own opinions, and not always in exact relation to the context.¹ We have several examples in *Hamlet*, for instance, in i. iv. 23–38, where he may have Aristotle in mind.¹ So also in the *Tempest*, iv. i. 148–158, the poet's remarks

¹ Cf. also with *Coriolanus*, iv. viii. 37–42.

In almost all these instances Shakespeare is improving on the language of some other writer; but this will be noticed later.

on a dramatic performance rise suddenly to a solemn reflection on human life. And somewhat similar is v. i. 33-57, another passage relating to the drama. More closely resembling our passage, however, is the well-known speech of Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, v. i. 2-22,¹ where a magnificent description of poetry emerges from and then again is lost among some remarks on the tricks played by fancy. So here, the passage begins with the imitation of humanity, rises to the moral and ideal purpose, and then sinks to the original level of imitation. And the ascent of thought is clearly marked. The poet uses the words "purpose" and "end," and, what is more important, the expression "hold up." But let me explain this at once. I have already pointed out that the figure of a mirror is often employed by Shakespeare at this period. It occurs three times² in this play, and it never *reflects*,

¹ As a suggestion for this, Mr. Churton Collins refers to Plautus (*Pseudolus*, i. iv. 7-10).

² There is a fourth and less figurative use in v. ii. 124, though even here a distinction is drawn between the "semblable" that is found in a mirror, and mere "umbrage" or reflection.

it always *reveals*. We turn to one of these examples, the scene of Hamlet's interview with his mother (Act III. Sc. iv.), and we note the similar expression "set up," which again implies a purpose—

" You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of
you."

And what is the purpose? Again most clearly, it is not reflection but revelation. It is that the queen may see something that she had not seen before, her guilty "inmost part"—

" Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very
soul,
And there I see such black and grained
spots
As will not leave their tinct."

If not sure of this, we must refer to *Julius Cæsar*, the play written, as we suppose, immediately before *Hamlet*, where this revealing purpose and effect of the mirror is set forth with more detail—

" Such mirrors as will turn
Your hidden worthiness into your
eye . . ."

“ I, your glass,
Will modestly discover to yourself
That of yourself which you yet know
not of.”

i. ii. 56-7 and 68-9.

This magic mirror, therefore, has a purpose and an effect far beyond mere reflection or imitation or copy. It reveals. Reveals hidden fault or hidden worthiness, and as we have seen, it was often so understood by authors before Shakespeare, or contemporary with him.

So Johnson, with this in mind, wrote, “The greatest graces of a play are to copy nature and instruct life.” But this ultimate and idealising effect is also explained in *Hamlet*, where we are told that the prince is—

“ The glass of fashion and the mould of form.”¹

The meaning here is that Hamlet was the *ideal*, the best interpreter, leader of fashion,

¹ Here again we have the word “form” as well as “glass,” and we note also that “mould” corresponds to “pressure” in our first example.

the model of elegance, manners, and so forth.¹

To sum up, therefore. Here are several examples, and four of them closely connected by date, wherein we recognise the same revealing and idealising purpose and effect of the mirror.

But we look at the passage again, and next we remember the poet's habit, after employing a figurative expression, of adding a less figurative explanation. It is so here—“Holds the mirror up to nature, and *thus shows*,” etc. Accordingly, as was noticed above, we have a statement of effect produced. And finally, in the “very age,” etc. (or whatever may be the true reading), Shakespeare passes from the individual to the community, and what are called in *Hamlet* “these pursy times,” their outward aspect, their deeper life.²

¹ Cf. *Cymbeline*, I. i. 48—

“Most praised, most loved,
A sample to the youngest, to the more mature,
A glass that feated them.”

² “Pressure,” as in I. v. 100, may also mean the “impression” we receive. For the “times,” cf. “There's something rotten in the state of Denmark,” “The time is out of joint,” “Denmark a prison.”

But the ethical meaning and purpose involved in this passage may be discovered in other ways ; indeed, as I remarked above, if we were dealing with any other writer, some of my exegesis would seem gratuitous. But in our days of scepticism and materialism and fatalism, we have a natural dread of finding in Shakespeare anything "moral," anything approaching to "goodness." And our dread has grown into a deeply-rooted prejudice. This is indeed a third danger in the matter of interpretation. For instance, if it were some other author, I need only point out that if the author had not believed in goodness and the sinfulness of sin, he would have made no mention of them in this passage. But on the other hand, if he did believe in goodness, then like all who so believe, he would speak out in its behalf on an occasion like this. In other words, if he were sketching, as in these two passages, the purpose of the drama and its representation, which reflect our best life, he would not omit to mention the most vital element in that life.

After thus far examining this notable passage, and getting at some of its fuller

meaning, we may call to our aid the classical authorities mentioned at the outset, especially Plautus, and they will confirm us in our opinion.

First, as I think, Shakespeare had read in Plautus (*Epidicus*, III. iii.) that "men need a mirror not only to see the face, but also that they may be enabled to see into the heart, its wisdom and hoarded wealth."¹ This idea he proceeds to elaborate in *Julius Cæsar* in the passage already referred to (Act I. Sc. ii.)—

"I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus,

. . .

It is very much lamented, Brutus,
That you have no such mirrors as will
turn,

¹ Non oris causa modo homines aequum fuit
Sibi habere speculum ubi os contemplarent
suom,

Sed qui perspicere possent [cor sapientiæ ;
Igitur perspicere ut possint] cordis copiam.
Worth quoting also is the following (Terence,
Adelphi, III)—

"Denique
Inspicere, tanquam in speculum, in vitas
omnium

Jubeo, atque ex aliis sumere exemplum sibi,"
where again we note the moral purpose and
effect.

Your *hidden worthiness* into your eye
That you might see your shadow . . .
And since you know you cannot see
yourself
So well as by reflection, I your glass
Will modestly discover to yourself,
That of yourself *which you yet know
not of.*"

It then occurs to him, as he writes the next play, that the same magic mirror may be used to turn the eye into the soul not of virtue, but of guilt, as in Hamlet's interview with his mother, with which we are already familiar. And finally, with Cicero and others in mind, he makes drama in general the glass with this twofold potency, wherein virtue may "discover" its "hidden worthiness," and vice its soul of guilt.

Thus also the classical suggestions support our interpretation. Perhaps we are too much accustomed to keep obligation and study and industry out of our conception of Shakespeare's methods of workmanship, and one refers to his resources almost with apology. But his habit and practice of dealing with authorities are daily growing

upon us, and often enough the most famous of his sayings refer us to some classical ancestry. No writer, I believe, has adopted or adapted to such an extent as the author of *Hamlet*, and therefore these illustrations from the classics may fitly close my investigation.

And if my methods of investigation should appear tedious, let me repeat that these are typical examples. But let me further urge that in dealing with Shakespeare no half measures are of any use. If we have before us a question of what Shakespeare is or says or means, nothing can avail us but a close examination of his text—closer perhaps than was attempted before. Only in this way can we render any real service to literature, or as I may well add, to Shakespeare.

IV

SHAKESPEARE AND HIS CRITICS

DURING the last few years Shakespeare has sat for his portrait pretty often, and sometimes has even played his (or another's) part on our modern stage, and the results, as I venture to think, are sometimes amazing, often humiliating, always unsatisfactory ; and there are times when I turn with relief to the old-fashioned sketches of Ben Jonson, Milton, Samuel Johnson, Dryden and the like. It will be the purpose of this essay to establish at least one good reason why these modern paintings or presentations of the man Shakespeare almost certainly fall short of the truth.

But first, why are we so anxious to seize upon the personality of a writer ? Surely we attach far too much importance to the biographer, the interviewer, and the scandal-

monger—and some of our recent estimates of Shakespeare are little better than scandal-mongering. It will be well, indeed, to make this a rule, that our students should learn by heart *The Tempest* and the fourth book of *Paradise Lost*, before being allowed to know that Milton was three times married, and wrote in favour of divorce, or that Shakespeare married a wife considerably older than himself, and that possibly he neglected her, and even (sometime or other, and for a longer or shorter time) loved another woman.

Besides, this knowledge is often a doubtful benefit. If my cobbler gives me good boots, what more do I want of him? What shall I gain by dissecting his soul? And this mention of boots reminds me of Johnson, who writes somewhere, “When a man is otherwise unobjectionable, I would not look with too great a scrupulosity at his boots.” And this quotation leads on to another, which warns us that we are content to judge all nature from her feet of clay, and forget to lift our eyes towards her head which is in the heavens. And here again we face a very important consideration, that an author may be—

perhaps ought to be—something inferior to his work. He will almost inevitably disappoint. He aims high, strives after the ideal, and is not likely to live up to his achievement. And while art is abiding, character fluctuates. “The grey - haired saint may fall at last.” He who has preached to others may himself become a castaway.

Still, our modern eagerness to get at an author is not without some justification. The creative presence of the artist is often an important element in the art work, and not seldom it may be easily recognised. Indeed, with this fact in mind, I myself once wrote, “At least his shadow will fall upon the pages as he bends over them . . . critics who contend for an absolute objectivity in the writings of Shakespeare forget that they are making a man into a machine. . . . The great artist puts into his work the best part of him, and in a long series of his creations the spirit of his life will become manifest. We shall know him at every turn of the long delightful way. . . . Its expression is due to the man Shakespeare, not to his drama. In one poetic drama we

greet him, and hear his voice, and shake him by the hand." This view is shared by Sir Walter Raleigh, where he writes: "No man can walk abroad save on his own shadow. . . . It is a plausible objection, and a notable tribute to Shakespeare's success in producing the illusions which are the machinery of his art. But it would never be entertained by an artist. . . . No dramatist can create live characters save by bequeathing the best of himself to the children of his art. . . . As we grow familiar with his work we are overwhelmed by the sense that we are in the presence of a living man . . . and are aware that all the knowledge that we gather by the way is authorised and communicated by himself. Everywhere, even where we follow with uncertain steps, we feel the pressure of his hand." These quotations bring me to the main subject of this paper. I shall endeavour to show that we, some of us, fail to detect the real Shakespeare in his achievement, and I shall also endeavour to show why.

Mainly it is this. We view his work from a Pagan standpoint, the standpoint let us

say of Aristotle, and then try to correct or modify or supplement our impressions by considerations that were once called Christian. We are not consistently Pagan, and our judgment becomes ambiguous—valueless. Whether it would be of the highest value if it were consistently Pagan will be discussed later. I will at least make my first position clear.

“Shakespeare’s critics,” says Sir Walter Raleigh,¹ “are so much more moral than the poet himself.” My point is, that they are less moral. I am speaking of the modern critics, and not, for example, of Samuel Johnson.

But first, we must examine briefly the relation between art and morals. What good is, what pleasure is, we know not. Our human plummet may not fathom the Absolute. But this we do know, and can prove, that in their fullest evolution our common notions of pleasure and good are inseparable. Any attempt to exclude ideas of goodness and morality from our considerations of pleasure, beauty, art, must end in failure. But I have no need to argue

¹ *Shakespeare, English Men of Letters.*

the point for myself. I shall prove it beyond possibility of contradiction from the critics themselves, a method that will be more convincing than any independent reasoning.

I must premise, however, that the moral element is not equally present in all works of art. We have the least of it in music, the only art that appeals to the animal intelligence ; but in sculpture, in painting, and in poetry, which includes within itself something of all the other arts, the moral element has now entered, by whatever process of evolution, and by whatever degrees, and it cannot be isolated.

Here let me correct a possible misapprehension. We have to avoid the two extremes. The first is Johnson's : " He that thinks reasonably must think morally . . . it is always a writer's duty to make the world better." This is sound enough, but Johnson goes on to complain that Shakespeare seems to write without any moral purpose, " he is so much more careful to please than to instruct." On the other hand, Sir Walter Raleigh remarks : " The plays have to do with a world too real to be included in any

moral scheme . . . All doctrines and theories are a poor and partial business compared with that dazzling vision of the pitiful state of humanity which is revealed by Tragedy." And the following he discovers in Shakespeare—"The vision, as it was seen by Shakespeare, is so solemn and terrible, and convincing in its reality . . . at any moment, by the operation of chance or fate, these things may be broken up . . . a profound sense of fate underlies all Shakespeare's tragedies." Thus to pessimism he adds fatalism. This estimate of Shakespeare's morality is thus tersely stated on another page of Sir Walter Raleigh's volume: "The tragic heroes and heroines are the antagonists of Fate. But Fate, in the realm of Comedy, appears in the milder and more capricious character of Fortune." Now, as I venture to think, either critic, Johnson or Sir Walter Raleigh, is wrong; Johnson in wishing Shakespeare to be more moral than he need be, Sir Walter Raleigh in wishing him to be less moral than he is; Johnson in expecting to find a pronounced system of morality in poetic dramas such as

Shakespeare's, and Sir Walter Raleigh in putting them outside the pale of morality altogether.

But in his article on *Shakespeare as a Teacher*, in the *Nineteenth Century* for April, 1910, Mr. Beeching writes : "On the other hand, it may be said Shakespeare was a dramatist, and the drama is an art, and art has nothing to do with religion, or even with morality. And Shakespeare was far too great an artist to care about teaching. He was content to hold up the mirror to nature."

What Shakespeare means by "hold the mirror up to nature, and show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image,' namely, 'Exhort men to hold fast that which is good, and avoid that which is evil," this I have endeavoured to show in a former essay. Here I pass the quotation over, and proceed to answer the question that Mr. Beeching raises, "Must art have a moral purpose ? "

It is a question easily answered. The purpose is the art, and the art the purpose, and the sole purpose of art is to give pleasure—

"Tis beauty, beauty, beauty first ; the rest Follow unbidden."

The real difficulty lies in the word "pleasure," which may range in meaning from "being tickled" to "doing good." Yet again, the difficulty is almost removed by this very divergence, and by our current use of the words *noble* and *ignoble*. As long as these preserve their vitality, there is no harm in the phrase, "Art for Art's sake." If the pleasure to be given is ignoble, the art also is ignoble. If the pleasure is noble, the art is noble. Beyond this we cannot—and we need not—go.

A moral purpose, then, avowedly such, is by no means essential to art. Art may include that purpose, and the purpose may raise it to a higher level, as in the case of *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*. On the other hand, such a purpose might imperil the work.¹ What I shall show—or rather, what I hope to make the critics show—is that the art of Shakespeare, like all modern art that is worthy of the name, has its moral element, and that in our appreciation we are

¹ In *Lycidas*, for example, where the intrusion of "the pilot of the Galilean Lake" is generally regarded as a blemish.

powerless to rid ourselves of moral considerations.

If we think the matter carefully over, this might have been expected. The same progressive moral instinct¹ that founded our modern society on marriage and the home, and that has abolished slavery, operates in the realm of pleasure, beauty, and art. It rejects gluttony and drunkenness, and bear-baiting and cock-fighting, excludes from its galleries the statues of Priapus, and (as we shall see later) calls the Restoration Drama "unreadable." Our modern humanity is highly complex, but integral. We cannot spend its moral inheritance in a day.² We cannot reject it even for a moment. When

¹ The varying from "being tickled" to "doing good" mentioned above, is twofold; it appertains (*a*) to the course of time, (*b*) to a given time, but it is chiefly by means of (*a*) that we graduate in (*b*); so also with art; in the ages nearer to man's "coarsest satyr shape" statuary might be represented by the Priapus of our text, the drama by the worship of Dionysus (why not by certain plays of Aristophanes?), and poetry by *Euhoe! Bacche!* or a cannibal war-cry.

² If we possess as little conscience, as little sense of right and wrong as did Iago, for example, we shall have Shakespeare looking down at our feet, and muttering "The Devil."—*Othello*, v. ii. 286,

we look at a picture or read a poem, it remains vital in all our being.¹ To doubt this would be as rational as to expect a flower to gaze at the sun with the earlier leaf elements of its development, or the eye to appreciate objects by the earlier sense of touch. Perhaps a quotation may make this clearer : "The Utilitarians, by substituting the word Pleasure for the word Good, even if the substitution were legitimate, have not really done much to help us in our choice. *Being*

¹ Again, this is truer of Shakespeare than of some of his contemporaries, and far truer, alas ! than of some of our modern drama. In him there is no parading of vice to draw an audience. I confess that when I read *Hamlet* (it is almost too sacred for acting) I receive something more than a mere tickling of my senses. I am enriched throughout my inseparable being, intellectual, emotional, moral ; and among the impressions left on my mind are certainly these : that Shakespeare was a great poet, and a great man, a worthy representative of that great age ; that in the body of beauty thus ravishingly but nobly created, he never failed to put a soul of truth ; that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in any one's philosophy, even that of the arch-dreamer himself ; that there 's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow ; that we pass through nature to eternity ; that we must repent what is past, avoid what is to come ; that as for me, I 'll go pray.

ordinary decent people, they accept the same values as the rest of the world, and on the same ground as the rest of the world, and then they pretend and no doubt believe themselves, that they have been led to the root of the matter by the hedonistic calculus.”¹ What art and beauty were to the Greeks is one thing, what they are to us is quite another thing. But once more, we are going to learn the truth from the critics themselves.

Sir Walter Raleigh’s charge of pessimism and fatalism brought against Shakespeare is met by Mr. Beeching in this way.² He reminds us that Shakespeare employed in his tragedies the Aristotelian convention, and that therefore they are ethical. But this is not nearly enough, and Mr. Beeching himself, as I may be able to show, admits the fact. Indeed, valuable as it is, I will select his article in order to complete my task of pointing out what I venture to regard as

¹ *The Meaning of Good*, by G. Lowes Dickinson, pp. 68, 70, 71. See also p. 205 (footnote) below.

² “Shakespeare as a Teacher,” by Rev. H. C. Beeching, *Nineteenth Century*, April, 1910.

a fallacy in many of these recent estimates of Shakespeare. At one time the writers distinguish between pleasure and good, beauty and morality, and at another (and I think with better justice) they do not. But they draw their conclusions *pro re nata* from either of these premises, and not infrequently they deduce a moral conclusion from a non-moral premise.

For example, on one page Mr. Beeching writes : "The lyric poet who sets out to express some human trait or emotion, is satisfied if he has succeeded in giving to it a delightful form. We judge his poem solely by æsthetic standards, and call it a bad or good poem quite apart from its relation to morality."

This seems plausible enough, and thus, as we may suppose, the average Greek critic would have written two thousand years ago. But (and here is the root of the whole matter), on the opposite page we read : "There are plays of Beaumont and Fletcher which would justify the severest Puritan strictures, and the plays of the Restoration

stage are now, for the most part, *unreadable*."¹

Now this word "unreadable" is just what that average Greek critic would not have used; nor would he have proceeded to argue, as Mr. Beeching does on the next page, that lyrical poetry (readable or unreadable I now add) has a "spiritual" influence. Nor could that Greek critic have employed the word "spiritual," not in its modern sense—

¹ The distinction "lyric" and "dramatic" cannot be a distinction between morality and immorality; and suppose we were to concede the point, there are plenty of "unreadable" lyrics in the drama. Just as green grass pleases the eye, so musical harmonies please the ear; into poetry each of these, colour and music, enters *along with thought*, and if the thought is moral it will please us if we are moral; if it is immoral, it will please us if we are immoral. Further, what has a moral influence must itself be moral; conversely, if immoral, its influence will be immoral.

Even in the twentieth century we cannot gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles; and even in the twentieth century we are moral, to some extent. We do not give school girls the *Ars Amoris* to learn by heart, or Aristophanes for a text-book; nor do we gloat over combats of naked gladiators; even on the stage, from which morality mostly takes its earliest departure, we are not left altogether naked. See also Essay VII.

“ The spirit does but mean the breath;
I know no more ”;

that is nearer to a Greek interpretation of the term.

Let me interpolate that I am not putting in a plea for morality, nor for Shakespeare. If morality is what I judge it to be, it can take care of itself. So I think, under this head, can Shakespeare. My plea at present is a modest yet a needful one. Once more, it is for *consistency*; let us have done with these hybrid ethics—¹

“ Ah, set free
From language those old words that lose
their sense,
Love, faith, hope, piety and purity;
The right to sin is no mean recompense;
To-day, then, be it clearly understood,
We must apologise for being good.”

From Mr. Beeching I pass on to Sir Walter Raleigh, in whose book these discrepancies are, as I venture to believe, still more noticeable; and as a typical and comprehensive work it will claim most of our space.

^{¶¶}¹ What a mockery, for example, to most of us, are such phrases as “God save the King,” “On Thee our hopes we fix,” “*Fidei Defensor*,” and so forth.

But first it will be instructive to get a clear view of the author's own sentiments, of those especially that are fundamental to this essay, and call for close examination, and then for a comparison with Shakespeare. Briefly, they are three in number, and they relate to our notions of goodness, sin, and fate.

In regard to the first of these, Sir Walter Raleigh writes : “ There is a kind of ingrained humility and loveliness in the character of those who are not righteous overmuch. Even a saint may miss it in the very act of taking pains.” I happen to have quoted a well-known line, “ The grey-haired saint may fall at last,” and I suspect that when he falls it is through some relaxing of his rule and habit of taking pains. Shakespeare would have learnt somewhere, that we must never stop so long as we see perfection ahead of us ; that misconduct must be followed by “ heart-sorrow, and a clear life ensuing ” ; that we must pray without ceasing,^{for} the Lord our God is a jealous God, or as he words it himself (Sonnet 146)—

" Then, Soul, live thou upon thy body's
loss
And let that pine to aggravate thy store ;
Buy terms divine in selling hours of
dross"

So also, " Every third thought shall be my grave." ¹

But next Sir Walter Raleigh tells us that " Virtue becomes an empty name, or fades into mere decorum, where sin is treated as a dark and horrible kind of eccentricity." This doctrine, I venture to think, is yet more dangerous. We are ready enough to palter with vice, and according to Shakespeare we may not extend our indulgence to the wicked—the Iagos, and Gonerils, and Regans, and the hundred other miscreants whom he has condemned to the shuddering detestation of all time. For my part I have no sympathy with intolerance, but what is equally important, I have no sympathy with con-

¹ *The Tempest*, I. v. 311.

Throughout this essay, as in the former one, I am concerned with morality as it appears in Shakespeare, especially in its relation to his own time; therefore I add that this fragment of his doctrine is by no means peculiar to himself. See Essay II, pages 90 and 91.

nivance. This also I believe (though the point will be discussed later) was the moral attitude of Shakespeare.¹ “ You are three men of sin . . . you amongst men, being most unfit to live.”² This time we will learn something from an age later than Shakespeare’s—

“ Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As to be hated, needs but to be seen ;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then
embrace.”

And we will learn something from an age later yet, for if this was true of the days of Pope, what shall be said of our own

¹ We must bear it in mind that in Shakespeare's time the “lower orders” were a degree lower than with us. It was more popularly supposed that nurture would not stick on them, and Shakespeare regarded them with some of the kind condescension of Lance for his dog. But for those who “ought to know better” he has less of this kind condescension. Thus, Falstaff is dismissed with “I know thee not, old man; fall to thy prayers.” But the others do not always escape whipping. Trinculo, one of the last and funniest and most amiable of all these dogs, leaves the stage “smarting in lingering pickle.”

² *The Tempest*, III. iii. 53, 57-8.

day? Verily we are getting tired of goodness—¹

“Come down and redeem us from virtue,
Our Lady of Pain.”

Still more important for our purpose is the author's view of fate, and of character in its relation to circumstance—“On his theatre, as in life, character is made by opportunity” The impulses and passions that shape man's life to happy or unhappy ends seem to owe their power to something greater than man, and refuse his control. In the duel with fate man is not the hunter but the game.” I will deal with this doctrine as briefly. First, if character is made by opportunity, and refuses man's control, if we are the sport of fate, how can there be any such thing as *character*? Some think the word implies that we have a hand in the making. Character is made by *re-action* against circumstance, and this re-action is the stronger, the creating force, for man's self-adjustment to his surroundings, physical,

¹ Some might even ask, “Is the time so very far off when the word will be expunged from our dictionaries, or marked as ‘obsolete’?”

mental or moral, is progressive. Even in our day this has been a general belief.¹ We have Browning : “ A brute I might have been, but would not sink i’ the scale.” Or Henley : “ I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.” And there is plenty of this in Shakespeare.

But on this subject of quoting, especially from Shakespeare, I must ask permission to refer to a former essay, where some reflections will be found that may perhaps guide us in the matter. Returning now to Sir Walter Raleigh, we will make a closer examination of his third position. He writes further : “ Morals, how should these help a man at the last encounter ? Men forge themselves these weapons, and glory in them, only to find them an encumbrance at the hour of need good conduct is of no avail. . . . At any moment, by the operation of chance or fate, these things may be broken up. . . . Morality is overwhelmed and tossed aside.” Who, I would ask, on reading this,

¹ We gain little, I think, from the later philosophies. Again we must appeal to intuition rather than to reason ; but see the fifth essay.

can escape the impression that all human effort is unavailing, that moral responsibility is a fable, and that everything is the sport of a malignant fate? Indeed, we turn for relief to Shakespeare: "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. . . ." "Love's not Time's fool. . . ."

"Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
And Death once dead, there's no more dying then."

"The critics more moral than Shakespeare?" Again I ask, may they not be less moral, some of them? Sir Walter Raleigh, at any rate, appears to treat Shakespeare's morality with some degree of ambiguity. This feature of his book, indeed, is remarkable, and again, so vital to our purpose that it must have a share of our attention. On one page he will tell us that "from the High Priest of Baal, Master W. S., his precise brethren might have had that schooling in the pleasures," etc., yet on other pages that "the simple pieties of life were dearest to

him." On more pages than one Shakespeare seems to have no morality, or is superior to it. On others we read of his "subtle and profound morality."

Next we have Shakespeare the optimist utterly destroyed by Shakespeare the pessimist : "In the wildest and most destructive of tempests his sheet-anchors hold," is quite at variance with "Shakespeare who watched his heroes, awe-struck, as he saw them, being drawn into the gulf . . . this sense of fate, this appreciation of the tides that bear man with them, whether he swim this way or that . . ."

Again, according to one page, when we read *King Lear*, we have "the comfort of the sure knowledge that Shakespeare is with us ; that he . . . found in the splendours of courage and love a remedy for despair." Yet on another page we read concerning the same play : "In *King Lear* there is an unmistakable note of disgust and disaffection towards the mere fact of sex . . . The voice that we have learned to recognise as Shakespeare's is heard, in its most moving accents, blaspheming the very foundations of life and

sanity." Again, on one page we have: "It is safe to assert that Shakespeare was a poet before he was a dramatist . . . the poet in Shakespeare sometimes forgets the dramatist . . . his earliest published works reveal him in a character wholly undramatic." With this we contrast: "He was not a lordly poet, who stooped to the stage and dramatised his song . . . he was bred in the tiring-room and on the boards." Again, we contrast, "All this ordered beauty was made possible by the strict subordination of stage effects to the needs and methods of poetry," with "In nothing is Shakespeare's greatness more apparent than in his concessions to the requirements of the Elizabethan theatre . . . his own vision of poetic beauty, and his own interpretation of human life are to be set forth under these rigid conditions." Once more: "If Shakespeare held any high and dry theories of drama, his thoughts can only have been a pain to him." On the other hand: "Let us have done with this, and do justice to Shakespeare as a craftsman . . . it is plain that he

recognised those advantages of tragic simplicity," etc.

To these apparent contradictions I will add only a few others that bear more closely on my main subject, namely, the moral character of Shakespeare. On one of his pages Sir Walter Raleigh tells us that Shakespeare has a leaning towards metaphysics, and speaks of "those subtle dialectical processes which had given him so much pleasure," and on another that he "distrusted reason and philosophy." Yet again, on one page we learn that "his reason being Shakespeare's reason, is superb in its outlook, and sits unmoved above the strife," and again on another, that "Shakespeare himself is not aloof and secure," and that he recovered from the "disease" of the tragedies. Again we have "a man of extraordinary strength and serenity of temper . . . his philosophic doubts . . . a whole-hearted lover of pleasure . . . the shifting phases of a life of contemplation . . . a lover of clear and decisive action . . . it can hardly be said that he was over-balanced by his imaginative powers . . . the gifts of

imagination and wide restless curious searchings of the intelligence and sympathies threatened at times to take sole possession, and paralyse his will." Lastly, "Shakespeare was one of those well-balanced plastic tempers . . . attract something less than their due share of observation . . . Shakespeare was a whole man." Yet again, the workings of his mind reveal him "subject to passion, removed by the width of the spheres from those prudent and self-contained natures. . . . His character was not all of a piece, neat and harmonious and symmetrical." To sum up, therefore, in the estimate of this author, Shakespeare, as it appears, is by no means "a whole man." He is, we might almost say, "everything by starts and nothing long"; a human kaleidoscope. And the impression we seem to receive from these contradictions is, that Bacchus was a teetotaller.

Another feature of the book, what I venture to regard as its questionable reasoning, will appear as we proceed. But I have first to mention some other critics, who though inspired by nobility of manner and of

purpose, seem to fall into error when dealing with the moral system of Shakespeare. Herein, for example, lies what I must regard as questionable in Dr. Bradley's most valuable work,¹ but this we shall see later. I may first note the phenomenon even in the pleasant volume of Mr. Stopford Brooke.² On one page he assumes: "No good is seen to arise from his tragedy (*King Lear*) ; the rest is silence." But a little farther on we read exactly the opposite: "What they have become through suffering lives for the inspiration of humanity, and attracts its love."

Something like this may be discovered if we contrast the following from Swinburne's *Study of Shakespeare*: "The fatalism of Othello is as much darker and harder than that of any third among the plays of Shakespeare, as it is less dark and hard than the fatalism of *King Lear*." Then the critic adds (of Cordelia and Imogen): "Godlike though they be, their very godhead is human and feminine, and only therefore credible and

¹ *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Macmillan, 1905.

² *On Ten Plays of Shakespeare*, Constable, 1905.

only therefore adorable." And of Desdemona : " In the face and teeth of all devils-akin to Iago that hell could send forth to hiss at her election, we feel and recognise the spotless exaltation, the sublime and sunbright purity of Desdemona's inevitable and invulnerable love." The darkness, I might remark, that reveals the godhead of Cordelia and the sunbright purity and invulnerable love of Desdemona is not the darkness of fatalism. But we shall find a more exact parallel to Mr. Stopford Brooke if we take one of the most recent of commentators on *Hamlet*, Mr. George Santayana.¹ To prove the moral tendency of this play we need only contrast the following contradictory passages : " Shakespeare's genius shines in the texture of his poems rather than in their structure, in imagery and happy strokes, rather than in integrating ideas. His poetry plays about life like ivy about a house, and is more akin to landscape than to architecture. He feels no vocation to call the stones themselves to their ideal places and enchant the very substance and skeleton of the world.

¹ *The Caxton Shakespeare.*

How blind to him, and to Hamlet, are all ultimate issues, and the sum total of things how unseizable. The heathen chaos enveloping everything is all the more sensible on account of the lovely natures it engulfs.” After thus summing up the case for the fatalist and pessimist, he turns completely round: “The world was sane enough if it fulfilled its purpose and gave a man an opportunity to test his own mettle. Those idiocies and horrors which he lived among would have been in truth the flights of angels that bore him to his rest.” Where now, we ask, is the “heathen chaos,” and the unseizable sum total of things? And the writer continues: “Express it how we will, the sympathetic reader will instinctively feel that he should pass over lightly the experience which the play depicts, and carry away from it only the moral feeling, the spiritual sentiment, which it calls forth in the characters.” And eventually, the stone which the builders rejected is become the head stone of the corner; thus: “We must take the fabric of destiny, in this tragedy and in that too, which we enact in the world, as it happens

to be, and think the moral lights that flicker through it bright enough to redeem it." And the writer concludes : " In Hamlet our incoherent souls see their own image. In him romantic potentiality and romantic failure wears each its own feature. In him we see the gifts most congenial and appealing to us reduced to a pathetic impotence, because of the disarray in which we are content to leave them." "*Because of the disarray in which we are content to leave them!*" Here at least is the true meaning and function of the magic mirror that Shakespeare holds up to the world. We may fancy him saying to us, " Be sure your sin—even your ' frailty of human nature'—will find you out. Behold a man, in many respects noble, in many respects like yourselves, endowed with gifts congenial and appealing to yourselves. Yet he failed, ' because of the disarray in which he was content to leave them.' Watch and pray, lest ye also enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Repent what 's past, avoid what is to come." May I be pardoned for one outburst of

practical morality in common speech, as I so plainly hear it spoken by Shakespeare? I must be pardoned, for I do no more than paraphrase Mr. Santayana.

But all this is to anticipate, and we pass on to Dr. Bradley who, after assuring us, "Nor can he be said to point distinctly in any direction where a solution might lie," writes thus of King Lear: "The business of the gods . . . was to lead him to attain through apparently hopeless failure the very end and aim of life"; and now Sir Walter Raleigh, after asserting Shakespeare's independence of morality, after representing him as a pessimist and a fatalist, and after assuring us that this is the only sane view of life, speaks of him nevertheless as having escaped "this peril to his own soul."

This mode of reasoning, I think, may fairly be described as a gathering of the fig while calling the tree a thistle. In other words, a non-moral premise is dragged on to a moral conclusion. I will try to explain this more clearly. I shall first show how Sir Walter Raleigh coincides with Dr. Bradley,

and thus be enabled to apply one argument to both writers :—

Dr. Bradley : “A man’s virtues help to destroy him.”

Sir W. Raleigh : “Othello, like Hamlet, suffers for his very virtues.”

Dr. Bradley : “It makes no difference whether they meant well or ill.”

Sir W. Raleigh : “Good conduct is of no avail.”

Dr. Bradley : “His fall produces a sense of contrast, of the powerlessness of man, and of the omnipotence—perhaps the caprice—of Fortune or Fate.”

Sir W. Raleigh : “The tragic heroes and heroines are the antagonists of Fate. But Fate, in the realm of comedy, appears in the milder and more capricious character of Fortune.”

Dr. Bradley : “Even character itself contributes to these feelings of fatality . . . the power from which they cannot escape is relentless . . . to say that the doer only gets what he deserves, in very many cases, . . . would be quite unnatural. We might not object to the statement that Lear deserved to suffer.” . . .

Sir W. Raleigh : "On his stage, as in life, character is made by opportunity. . . . The impulses and passions . . . seem to owe their power to something greater than man, and refuse his control. . . . It is not true to say that in these tragedies character is destiny . . . he is a man carried off his feet . . . Lear, no doubt, has faults."

Dr. Bradley : We watch what is . . . feeling that so it happened, and must have happened, that it is . . . awful . . . but neither passing sentence, nor . . ."

Sir W. Raleigh : "Shakespeare who watched his heroes awestruck, as he saw them being drawn into the gulf, passed no such judgment on them."

Dr. Bradley : "An assignment of amounts of happiness and misery . . . in proportion to merit, we do not find."

Sir W. Raleigh : "What they suffer is out of all proportion to what they do and are."

Dr. Bradley : "What they achieve is not what they intended. It is terribly unlike it. . . . If we do not feel at times that the power from which they cannot escape is relentless, we have failed to receive an essential part of the full tragic effect."

Sir W. Raleigh : "They are presented with

a choice, and the essence of tragedy is that choice is impossible."

Dr. Bradley : " His tragic view can hardly have been in contradiction with this faith . . . the hero . . . and others drift struggling to destruction like helpless creatures borne on an irresistible flood towards a cataract."

Sir W. Raleigh : " Morality is not denied. It is overwhelmed and tossed aside by the inrush of the sea."

Dr. Bradley : " If we do not feel at times that the hero is in some sense a doomed man, . . . we have failed to receive an essential part of the tragic effect."

Sir W. Raleigh : " Without this sense of fate, this appreciation of the tides that bear man with them, whether he swim this way or that, tragedy would be impossible."

These are the most important of the resemblances between the two writers, and they are probably enough to explain my remark that the arguments of either commentator may be met by the same method of refutation.

Briefly, this is Dr. Bradley's case. He begins by excluding morality, and then is occasionally compelled to shift his tragic

position from the “strictly æsthetic” to the moral. And this involves him—and the same is still more true of Sir Walter Raleigh—in contradictions or dilemmas, as for instance where he is compelled to explain the death of Cordelia and the death of Macbeth by the same tragic principle. More than once in the course of his book he abandons his non-moral unifying principle of tragedy to fall back on a moral principle with its moral divisions.

I will make this perfectly clear by three quotations, which will exhibit him (*a*) consistent with his “strictly æsthetic” principle of tragedy; (*b*) in a transition state; (*c*) exclusively moral. (*a*) “The ideas of justice and desert are, it seems to me, in *all* [italics *sic*] cases—even those of Richard III and Macbeth—untrue to our imaginative experience.” This, once more, is the “strictly æsthetic” principle upon which he bases his argument. It absolutely excludes the principle of right and wrong, or, as he phrases it, “our every day legal and moral notions.”¹ But on another page he tells us that with

¹ The point will be more fully explained in Essay V.

regard to Richard III and Macbeth, we (b) "mingle sympathy and enthusiastic admiration with *desire for their defeat.*" Here "sympathy and enthusiastic admiration" stands for the strictly æsthetic principle; but the words I print in italics, viz, "desire for their defeat," embody "the ideas of justice and desert," i.e. *the excluded moral element* of quotation (a). In other words, Dr. Bradley here shows us the two doctrines in conflict. He distrusts his strictly æsthetic principle, finds it no longer tenable, admits the excluded moral principle, and, as I must believe, his argument fails. For even an æsthetic principle cannot be both one thing and two things. It cannot be both white and black and white. It cannot *both exclude and admit* another principle.

And now for (c) the third quotation, which is merely moral. On another page the same author tells us with regard to the same Macbeth, that *we have no inclination to love him*, and that we regard him with more of awe than pity. Where now is the "sympathy and enthusiastic admiration?" We have moral judgment, and that alone.

I pass on to Sir Walter Raleigh. With him it is precisely the same. He is constantly compelled to leap from his non-moral premise to a moral conclusion. We have had in brief many examples of this. I will add two others, and state them more fully. One is as follows : “ Morals, how should these help a man at the last encounter ? The tragic heroes . . . are the antagonists of Fate . . . Fate in the realm of Comedy appears in the milder and more capricious character of Fortune . . . choice is impossible . . . good conduct is of no avail . . . morality is overwhelmed and tossed aside.”

With this we contrast : “ Shakespeare points to no conclusion, unless it be this, that the greatest and loveliest virtues are not to be had for nothing. They must suffer for their greatness. In life they suffer silently, without fame. In Shakespeare’s art they are made known to us, and wear their crown . . . made perfect in the act of death . . . the idea of murder is lost in the sense of sacrifice.”

As another example, I may repeat some of Sir Walter Raleigh’s remarks on fate, and his

summary of *King Lear*, and confront them with a different conclusion. "In *King Lear* . . . there is an unmistakable note of disgust and disaffection towards the mere fact of sex. . . . The voice that we have learned to recognise as Shakespeare's is heard, in its most moving accents, blaspheming the very foundations of life and sanity . . . the pitiful state of humanity which is revealed by tragedy . . . a profound sense of fate underlies all Shakespeare's tragedies." Over against this we may set the following: "The thought that was painfully working in Shakespeare's mind reached its highest and fullest expression in the cry of King Lear. Many men make acquaintance with Christian morality as a branch of codified law. . . . A few, like Shakespeare, discover it for themselves by an anguish of thought and sympathy . . . If Lear had refused to be reconciled with Cordelia, there would be good reason to talk of Shakespeare's pessimism. As it is, there is no room for such a discussion."¹

¹ For a further note on these passages, see the author's *Handbook to Shakespeare*, Second Edition, pages xi and xii.

These illustrations from writers whose opinions—or so it appears to me—are occasionally inconsistent, must end here; but many remain to be noticed. Perhaps at some other time I may complete my task of vindication, and show more clearly that criticism adverse to Shakespeare's morality ends almost invariably by proclaiming him to be one of the greatest of moral teachers.

V

TRAGEDY IN SHAKESPEARE

IN my essay on the critics of Shakespeare, some of whom could find no moral teaching in his writings, yet ended by becoming advocates of his morality, I mentioned that a recent paper contributed by Mr. Beeching to the *Nineteenth Century*¹ would serve to complete my task. That task, as I may here explain, is an attempt to vindicate Shakespeare by pointing out what I must regard as errors in the reasoning of some of his critics.

But in this article of Mr. Beeching we have a lofty and valuable endeavour to uphold Shakespeare on the side of morality. Before reviewing it, however, I must refer briefly to the doctrines of tragedy as they are taught by Aristotle, on whom, and rightly as I think,

¹ "Shakespeare as a Teacher," *Nineteenth Century*, April, 1910.

Mr. Beeching has based his argument. But I cannot follow him to his conclusion.

It is more than possible that Shakespeare had definite notions of tragic composition, though likely enough he never troubled to formulate them. Yet here opinion may differ, and although Johnson made the pertinent remark, "His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy instinct," the same writer thus delivers his opinion of Shakespeare as a tragic artist: "He . . . seems not to have distinguished the three kinds (History, Comedy, Tragedy) by any definite idea. . . . Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions exhibiting . . . joy or sorrow mingled with endless variety of proportion, and innumerable modes of combination. . . . Through all these demonstrations of the drama Shakespeare's mode of composition is the same, an interchange of seriousness and merriment. . . . In tragedy he is always struggling after some occasion to be comic, but in comedy he seems to repose or luxuriate as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature."

That this opinion of Johnson has some weight is attested by Sir Walter Raleigh, who in his *Shakespeare* repeats it thus: “The threefold division has no value for dramatic criticism. . . . Even the time-honoured distinction of Tragedy and Comedy gives no true or satisfying division of Shakespeare’s plays. . . . Between the most marked examples of the two kinds there is every degree and variety of tragic and comic interest, exhibited in rich confusion. . . . All the materials and all the methods of Shakespeare’s Tragedy are to be found dispersed in his Comedy. . . . It is as if Shakespeare were carried into tragedy against his will.”

Whatever germ of truth may be discovered in these opinions, it is certain that each writer in practice adopts the well-known classification, and seems to find it both plausible and indispensable. For my part, I have little doubt that Shakespeare knew something of the doctrines of tragedy as they are expounded by Aristotle,¹ and in this again I am supported by Mr. Beeching, where

¹ See also *Studies in Shakespeare*, by John Churton Collins.

he writes on p. 396 of his article : “ It is not unreasonable to suppose that when Shakespeare set to work upon his tragedies he should have cared to know what the greatest of ancient critics had said about his art. . . . Shakespeare alone saw the palmary idea, and acted upon it.”

But in this “ palmary idea ” of Aristotle, as also in the argument Mr. Beeching has based upon it, there still lurks, I believe, the difficulty which I have ventured to point out in Dr. Bradley’s great work. We must, therefore, give some attention to the subject, and first of all quote the doctrine of Aristotle, which occurs in his *Poetic*. Having postulated that tragedy should represent actions which excite pity and fear, he continues : “ Neither should the eminently virtuous man be represented as falling from prosperity to adversity, for this is not a matter of fear or pity, but revolting . . . Nor again should the fall of the wicked man from prosperity to adversity be exhibited ; for although such a tragic motive may be gratifying to our moral sense, it excites neither pity nor fear, inasmuch as our pity is aroused by mis-

fortune undeservedly suffered, and our fear by some resemblance between the sufferer and ourselves. Neither of these effects, therefore, is produced by such an incident. (But see *King Lear*, v. iii. 231-2.)

There remains, then, a choice between these extremes, a character, that is to say, neither eminently virtuous or just, nor yet involved in misfortune through deliberate vice or villainy, but through some error of human frailty. And this personage should be of high fame and fortune. . . . To this we should add that earlier in the same treatise Aristotle had spoken of tragedy as "effecting by pity and fear the purification (or purging) of such emotions."

"What made Aristotle write this?" and "What is the truth of it?" and "What is its relation to modern thought?" These three questions are imperative, and we must attempt a brief answer, however imperfect.

First, his doctrine is perhaps æsthetic rather than ethical, and would fit men, not so much for the strenuous moral life known to us, as for the refined intelligence, the indolent ease "fabled of the quiet gods."

Next, he has in mind Plato, one of whose objections to tragedy was, that it over-stimulated the emotions. "No," said Aristotle; "one fire drives out another's burning" (or as Shakespeare elsewhere puts it more aptly, "as fire drives out fire, so pity pity"). Let men purge themselves with this fire (of emotion), and by judicious exercise of their emotions give them harmony." More important to us, however, are the interpretations that seem to be of loftier import, and allow our pity and fear to be spiritually purified by the spectacle of tragedy. And these interpretations were current in the time of Shakespeare.

Next it seems to have occurred to Aristotle that there are roughly three kinds of men, the good, the bad, and an intermediate class; and that as most of us belong to this class, it is the tragic experience of such that should be placed before us—of characters, that is to say, like our own. From these we should learn more readily. And lastly, remembering that art aims at the ideal, he postulates that such characters must be "great," not morally great, like the first class, but notable,

great in place or birth, and therefore more interesting, more suitable for ideal treatment.¹

How far Aristotle intends his character to be morally great will appear as we proceed. But at this point I must remark that some of our latter-day difficulties seem due to our habit of confusing greatness with goodness, and with the modern meaning of the word "noble." At present, let us say, under this head of the ideal, the tragic character is great with a social, physical, intellectual greatness.² He is opposed to inferior beings, the base-born, the small, the weak, the ignorant, the commonplace. That is his "strictly æsthetic" position, that and no more. And we must be careful not to think of Richard III or Macbeth as being morally great or even "noble." We must remember that their greatness connotes

¹ Of course he has in mind the notable characters of Greek tragedy, some of whom he mentions in his context. We might remark that this "fame and fortune" seems to remove them to some distance from ourselves.

² In the case of women, the ideal equivalent is mostly personal beauty; this, again, has no necessary connection with goodness.

uncommonness rather than goodness, otherwise we shall pass along the fallacy (*a*) greatness, (*b*) nobleness, (*c*) goodness, and set up a cross classification. We must not forget that this tragic "greatness" is a quality man shares with the mastodon, or the tiger, whereas goodness is something both greater and later. Now the only æsthetic quality possessed by all the tragic characters is that ideal quality of uncommonness. They are "exceptional beings." On this basis we can classify if we will, but directly we take "greatness" as the basis of classification we must, as so many critics have done, allow it to connote nobleness, and again goodness. Thus, when Dr. Bradley admits of Shakespeare that "some of his heroes are far from being good," that this tragic trait, a fatal gift, carries with it a touch of greatness, we may agree with him. But when he further claims for them "nobility of mind," and begins to classify them by the degrees in which they stir our sympathy—a small measure as in the case of Macbeth, a large measure as in the case of Hamlet, our entire sympathy as in the case

of Cordelia—we at once notice that these are degrees of goodness, and that all such distinctions are moral.¹

Now, in the short space of one essay it is seldom possible to give in full the considerations that determine our statements; but here, as a typical case, I will exhibit them more at large.

Moral considerations and distinctions the writer does not allow; the æsthetic and proper tragic standpoint, he says, must exclude moral judgment, "every-day legal and moral notions," desire for the defeat² of a tragic character, and so forth. But of

¹ "The ideas of justice and desert are, it seems to me, in *all* cases, even those of Richard III and of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, untrue to our imaginative experience. When we are immersed in a tragedy, we feel towards dispositions, actions, and persons, such emotions as attraction and repulsion, pity, wonder, fear, horror, perhaps hatred; but we do not *judge*. This is a point of view which emerges only when, in reading a play, we slip, by our own fault or the dramatist's, from the tragic position, or when, in thinking about the play afterwards, we fall back on our everyday legal and moral notions."—*Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 32 and 33. For a note on this, see page 205 of this article, footnote.

² "This desire, and the satisfaction of it, are not tragic feelings."—*Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 22.

Macbeth and Richard III he remarks on a later page (63) : “ We mingle sympathy and enthusiastic admiration with a desire for their defeat.” Here “ desire for their defeat ” is moral judgment, whereas “ sympathy and enthusiastic admiration ” (such as we feel for a wounded and undaunted tiger) are the æsthetic and proper emotions, based on tragic greatness, not on moral goodness. Thus, on another page (22), Macbeth “ compels a horrified sympathy.” But the same writer (20) tells us that “ when there is joined to it (the ‘ fatal gift ’) nobility of mind, or genius, or immense force, we realise the full power and reach of the soul, and the conflict in which it engages acquires that magnitude which stirs not only sympathy and pity, but admiration, terror, and awe.”

But again, a little farther on (22) we read : “ The tragic hero with Shakespeare, then, need not be ‘ good,’ though generally he is ‘ good,’ *and therefore* at once wins sympathy in his error.” Here, as must be evident, we have moral judgment, and the word “ sympathy ” is seen to have passed

through the stages I have indicated, till it becomes based, not on tragic greatness, but on moral goodness. Thus, therefore, the "strictly æsthetic" doctrine of tragedy is abandoned, and the moral doctrine with its moral divisions is acknowledged; and why? Very briefly, but very sufficiently,—because of that word "nobility." "'Tis only noble to be good.' I will make this clearer. Dr. Bradley tells us that Lady Macbeth was "too great to repent," that is, too great to be good. How do we reconcile this with his other statement that "all things in the world are vanity except love"? From this point of view a pious and loving washerwoman is a much "greater" heroic character than Lady Macbeth. But this lapsing from a non-moral premise to moral conclusions is more fully explained in my former article, "Shakespeare and his Critics," where the practice is described as a gathering of the fig while calling the tree a thistle. Here I will add only one other brief illustration. On one page of Dr. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* we read that the tragic "heroic

spirit," in spite of failure, is "nearer to the heart of things than the smaller, more circumspect, and perhaps even 'better' beings," that the greatness of soul which tragedy exhibits, oppressed, conflicting and destroyed, is the highest existence in our view ; that is to say, æsthetic greatness is superior to moral goodness. But on another page the writer assures us that "honour, conscience, humanity," are "higher" than Macbeth's tragic greatness ; and we ask, "Can tragic greatness be both superior and inferior to moral goodness ?" This, let me venture to add, is the bare truth, that the "mood of æsthetic delight"¹ from which we are to exclude all moral considerations is the mood of the gladiatorial combat, the bull fight, or the cock pit ; but in our generation we are compelled to leave that mood behind, and ascend a moral ladder as we mourn the beauty and "greatness" of the slain tiger, then that of Richard III, then that of Macbeth, then that of Antony, then that of Hamlet, then that of Cordelia ; and ultimately we recognise that "greatness"

¹ Wyndham, *The Poems of Shakespeare*.

begins with the mastodon, and the tiger, and self, and destructiveness, and ends with self-sacrifice and love.

“ But what is *noble*? You have asked me ; well,
 Let the mere word attest ; it grew ;
 survey
 Its growth ; down-track it to the root ;
 then up
 To pluck it at the ripest. There it notes
 Not greatness of the lion, nor mere bulk
 Of mastodon, nor height of rank or
 birth,
 Nor animal courage of the camp, nor even
 The wisdom of the wise ;—more than all
 these,
 Greatness that comes of goodness ;
 mark, I say,
 The definite moral up-growth ; if we fail
 In this, we fail in all ; the virtues range
 From self to sacrifice.”

But now, returning to Aristotle, we admit
 that there is a large element of reasonableness
 in his famous theory, and are scarcely sur-
 prised that it should have held its ground so
 long ; yet it seems to involve many difficulties.
 Nor is this entirely due to the fact that we
 regard it from a more advanced moral

standpoint, or that Shakespeare did, for in his drama we have the conception of moral responsibility and a beneficent Providence, which are the ethical growth of some two thousand years. I believe that this will become more evident as I proceed, and I make the statement at this point because our examination of this passage from Aristotle could hardly proceed without it.

Well, then, we look again at Aristotle's exposition, and we either pity the misfortune of the good, or better, find refuge in a loftier belief that virtue is its own reward. And why may we not learn something from the punishment of the wicked?¹ What

¹ The hanging of a criminal is supposed to be a warning against crime; and who may not become a criminal? This Aristotle rejects from his aesthetic scheme, but it seems to be Shakespeare's thought in the following: "This judgement of the heavens that makes us tremble Touches us not with pity" (*King Lear*, v. iii. 231-32). But as a probable suggestion of this passage Mr. Churton Collins (*Studies of Shakespeare*) quotes Aristotle: "What excites terror is different from what excites pity, and indeed drives it out." Here, as it seems, a distinction is made between such "terror," and the wholesome "fear" we experience at the fall of the indifferent. Milton, however (Preface to *Samson Agonistes*), writes: "Tragedy . . . said by Aristotle to be of power, by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind."

should we have said of Shakespeare if Richard III or Macbeth—ay, or even Brutus¹—had been left unpunished? Is there no moral element involved in the “pity and fear”? But we will put aside the questions that rise up before a modern investigation, while we point out the crucial difficulty of the passage as it stands. “Our pity,” he says, “is aroused by misfortune undeservedly suffered.” The intermediate² or *ἀμορτία* class therefore, who arouse our pity, suffer undeservedly. But I almost think the argument fails unless we admit that the intermediate are good.

I will try to make this clearer. Already it will be noticed that the differentiating quality, or basis of classification, is merit, desert. This we might gather from Aristotle’s “undeservedly.” The extremes, as it

¹ These three characters may roughly represent gradations from “villain” to “hero.” Richard III has least to commend him; Macbeth is something more than a masterful soldier, he has poetic feeling and, as I believe, a spice of conscience, and at times he seems to come under the influence of supernatural soliciting. Brutus is philosophic, meditative, moral; but the basis of this classification will be discussed later.

² Whether “between” or “somewhere between.”

appears, are the good and the wicked. The wicked fall deservedly, the good fall undeservedly. But if the intermediate also fall undeservedly, they have lost their differentiating quality, or must be placed with the good. Otherwise we must admit that they are partly good and partly wicked, or better, that they fall partly deservedly and partly undeservedly.

Does this remove the difficulty? or does Aristotle's intention, as expressed in his context, that these characters should place themselves nearer to the good?¹ This we must endeavour to ascertain. But new difficulties spring up at every turn. As I point out in a later note (page 202), when we commit a fault it is with the

¹ It will be understood that I examine the doctrine not in its relation to Greek tragedy, which so frequently admitted notions of inherited, or what may perhaps be termed "supernatural" misfortune, but in its relation to Shakespeare. In his tragedies, misfortune comes almost entirely from within, and has little reference to external causes. Again, it might seem plausible that Aristotle in his day, and from his point of view, should place "nearer to the good" a character whose "fault" nevertheless involved itself and others in ruin; that he should seek to explain this fault as not deliberate, as *ἀμαρτία*, an error of human frailty, and so forth. But even

whole of our composite nature. How, then, shall we define this intermediate position? Nor is there any reason why the intermediate should not be punished deservedly. We shall not mend the matter by saying that the punishment may be excessive, for on the other hand, why should it not be too lenient? Besides, this is a shifting of the basis of classification, and a change in the principle of tragedy.*

in Aristotle, as I venture to think, we can hardly accept the statement that the misfortune is "undeservedly suffered." "Fault," especially such as brings ruin or destruction to others, is surely less excusable in those of high estate. "It behoves the high, For their own sakes, to do things worthily." *Noblesse oblige.* Nine-tenths of the difficulty underlying or derived from this doctrine of Aristotle springs, as we shall see, from a careless use of the words *impossible* and *undeserved*, and from the tendency to regard physical, social, or even intellectual greatness as an excuse for "fault."

* I will point to some of the other difficulties involved, most of which are examined in the pages that follow. Here I merely enumerate them. (1) What intermediate position does the character occupy? (2) Tragedy (Shakespeare's at any rate) is concerned *not so much with what a man is* (when he first comes on the stage) *as with what he becomes.* Take the case of Macbeth. In the same way tragedy takes no account of the "may have been" (whether for or against the character). Hamlet had loved his mother, for doubtless she

What follows ? That when Shakespeare seized upon this “ palmary idea ” of Aristotle, and made some of his tragic characters like Hamlet “ indifferent honest,” he found it debatable. Whether unconsciously or otherwise (it makes no difference) he modified it very considerably, chiefly by admitting the factors I have already pointed out, Providence and moral responsibility.

But this, as I have endeavoured to show elsewhere, requires small argument, for it is well seen in the experience of those critics who begin by putting Shakespeare into their own æsthetic position—a position soon found to be untenable—and then, by whatever degrees and covering of their retreat, abandon it. And now again the truth seems

had been a good woman ; and before the crime, Hamlet’s uncle may have led a blameless life ; so might even Iago. (3) If the “ hero ” falls through his own fault, he falls deservedly, and takes the position of the wicked ; if not through his own fault, he falls undeservedly, and as far as the play is concerned takes the position of the good. (4) Shall we admit “ extenuating circumstances ” ? (5) Then there is the question of degree of merit, and proportionate punishment. (6) Is it possible for a character to commit a fault and remain “ good ” or “ noble,” or, again, to commit the fault with a part of his being, etc., etc. ?

to emerge even from the difficulties of Aristotle, and it will enable us, I believe, to throw some light upon Mr. Beeching's earnest endeavour, as I must presently show.

But first it will be asked, "What is this truth that emerges from the difficulties of Aristotle?" Now, although we have already had a glimpse of it, and I am confident that by the time I have examined Mr. Beeching's arguments a sufficient answer to this question will be forthcoming, I will nevertheless add, what is perhaps demanded by my subject, a somewhat closer examination of the passage.

We will represent Aristotle's classes of the good, the intermediate, and the bad by the letters A, B, and C, and note first how they occur in the tragedies of Shakespeare. In those of earlier date, presumably before he had met with or given thought to the principles of Aristotle, we have (not to mention *Titus Andronicus*) none of Class B, that is to say, of Aristotle's tragic type. Perhaps *Richard II* comes near to it, but not near enough. *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy of Class A (some would say B, but I see no

ground for this). The others are decidedly in Class C. But the tragedies from *Julius Cæsar* to *Coriolanus* have mostly a protagonist of type B. Frequently, moreover, we have in the same play all the three classes, that is to say, the "villain," the "hero," and the "virtuous": thus King Claudius, Hamlet, Ophelia; Iago, Othello, Desdemona; Goneril, Lear, Cordelia.¹ And in each instance the other two are scarcely less important than the protagonist.²

This examination of the three classes brings us to the root of Aristotle's theory. He seems to postulate that protagonist B does not "deserve" his fate. But as to "fault" and gradations of fault, who shall determine? We take the case of Brutus, who is generally regarded as the best type of Class B; but he became a murderer, and as a murderer he deserves a sterner penalty even than Macbeth,

¹ "Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle and low, an excellent thing in
woman."—*King Lear*.

² In *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, we have the bipartite protagonist, male and female as one, the ideal human being, the "Man Left to be finished by such as she."—*King John*.

"For Brutus, as you know, was Cæsar's angel."

As a fact, Shakespeare makes no pretence of maintaining the gradations, though he does full justice to Aristotle's *ἀμαρτία* type,¹ and seems inclined at the outset to shelter it beneath every Greek privilege. This might appear, I believe, from the following passage (*Hamlet*, I. iv. 27–36)—

"So oft it chances in particular men,
That for some vicious mole of nature in
them,
As, in their birth—wherein they are not
guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin—
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of
reason,
Or by some habit that too much o'er-
leavens
The form of plausible manners, that these
men,

¹ "The Protagonist should therefore be one who stands morally between the two extremes, not eminently virtuous, but not without virtue, the calamities befalling him being due, not to villainy and baseness, but to some error of judgment, some flaw in character, some inherited taint or criminal legacy."—Churton Collins on Aristotle's *ἀμαρτία* ("error or frailty").

Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
 Being nature's livery, or fortune's star,—
 Their virtues else—be they as pure as
 grace,
 As infinite as man may undergo—
 Shall in the general censure take
 corruption
 From that particular fault; the dram
 of eale
 Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
 To his own scandal."

But if we turn to a somewhat similar passage in *Coriolanus* (iv. vii. 37-42), we notice a change. We miss the precise reservation "wherein they are not guilty." At least, the poet has something to say against as well as in behalf of the doctrine that we are not altogether accountable for our faults, that they may be inherited, and so forth—

" He could not
 Carry his honours even: whether 'twas
 pride,
 Which out of daily fortune ever taints
 The happy man; whether defect of
 judgement,
 To fail in the disposing of those chances
 Which he was lord of; or whether nature,

Not to be other than one thing, not
moving
From the casque to the cushion, but
commanding peace
Even with the same austerity and garb
As he controlled the war; but one of
these—
As he hath spices of them all, not all,
For I dare so far free him— . . .”

iv. vii. 36-46.

Here the three “faults” of Coriolanus are indicated and described, but not explained away as being “nature’s livery, or fortune’s star,” and we get still nearer to the truth in an earlier passage—

“ He bears himself more proudlier,
Even to my person, than I thought he
would
When first I did embrace him ; yet his
nature
In that’s no changeling ; and I must
excuse
What cannot be amended.”

iv. vii. 8-12.

But, not to leave us in any doubt, the poet thus allows the mother to rebuke her son—

“ Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck’dst
it from me,
But owe thy pride thyself.”

In this way, as I believe, we gather Shakespeare's real opinion of "inherited fault," of the general claim of heredity or "fortune's star" to influence conduct; and even of "the luck of Cæsar which the gods give men To excuse their after wrath."

But if we think that the question of moral responsibility is sometimes left a little open when Shakespeare begins to illustrate Aristotle's "error of human frailty," let us pass on to the last of the great tragedies, *Antony and Cleopatra*; there, at least, we shall find it firmly and finally answered—

" Antony . . . that would make his
will
Lord of his reason . . .
O misery on 't!—the wise gods seal our
eyes;
In our own filth drop our clear
judgements; make us
Adore our errors; laugh at 's, while we
strut
To our confusion."

So, in the Bible, "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart." Also, in *Othello*, "We have reason to cool our raging motions,

our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts . . . The power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills"; and yet again, in *King Lear*, "As if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, . . . and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on."

Thus, then, Shakespeare deals with every variety of "fault," and ultimately with an equal justice—the justice of "conscience." He gives us "sins of will, Defects of doubt, and taints of blood." He gives us sins of omission or commission, of infatuation or insolence, of excess or defect ("o'er-growth of some complexion," "stamp of one defect") : we have Nemesis that overtakes guilt, and character at variance with circumstance; sins premeditated or sins due to want of self-control: we may have a besetting sin, as in the case of Antony, or the opposite, as in the case of Othello, who was not easily jealous ; it may be known to the sinner, and a ceaseless cause of trouble to him, as it was to Hamlet, or unknown, as to Coriolanus. But however we may extend the catalogue of these sins or

" faults," we learn from Shakespeare that, small or great, not one of them is excusable in the sight of heaven, for "the power and corrigible authority lies in our wills." In play after play he shows us that they are all morally destructive to ourselves and to others, and may lead to murder; indeed, (footnote, page 198), in his ideal method they do lead to murder, nearly all of them. But it will be most instructive to quote briefly some of the poet's own comments on his tragic characters. Brutus, though distinguished from the other conspirators by singleness of purpose, is nevertheless forced to confess his crime in the words, "Cæsar, now be still," which are an exact repetition of the dying words of Cassius, "Cæsar, thou art avenged"; and by a curious irony, the man who refused to kill himself merely "for fear of what might fall," nevertheless kills Cæsar for the much more contemptible fear of what he "might become"; and he rightly takes rank with "these butchers." The same epithet, "butcher," is applied to Macbeth, and this at the end of the play, where the poet drops the showman, and

speaks for himself ; and in the same line Lady Macbeth is denounced as “ fiendlike.” In their vaulting ambition they o'er-leapt themselves, and made Scotland a “ grave.”

Of Antony we have heard Shakespeare's estimate, and there is more to the same effect ; and to what he has said of Coriolanus let us add the poet's condemnation of a pride that attempted to

“ Stand

As if a man were author of himself
And knew no other kin.”

Attempted to stand ; but he did not persist in the attempt. He repented, and thus the play closely resembles *King Lear*. His pride bowed before his mother, and love won over again its victory of the earlier play ; and each play should be styled, “ Love Triumphant.” Again death followed the victory, but again, as in *King Lear*, counted for nothing but glorious immortality. For these were the alternatives : Pride ? “ His name Remains to the ensuing age abhor'd ;” Sacrifice ? “ He shall have a noble memory.”

Othello was more sinned against than

sinning, but the man who, in a fit of jealousy could murder his perfect chrysolite of a wife is a sinner of no mean order, and the hard truth about him comes from the lips of Emilia : " What should such a fool do with so good a woman ? " Hamlet condemns himself without measure for his venial delay of " rough justice," a justice not unlike that of Lear when he killed the slave that was hanging his daughter ; and as to *King Lear*, still more than *Coriolanus*, it differs from the common cast of tragedy. Still more clearly Shakespeare wished to make his list of sins and sinners complete by giving us the spectacle of one sinner that was repentant ; it is in fact a Divine Comedy that ends happily ; for the repenting Lear, and the angel who was his daughter, though prisoners in a prison, could sing together " like birds i' the cage." Death to them was of more value than life, for it was the eternal consecration of their love : on their mutual sacrifice the gods themselves threw incense. There is nothing in Shakespeare more ennobling, more inspiring, or more convincing than this

love to which death could give only immortality. “The readiness is all”; that is what Prospero (or Shakespeare, it matters little which) meant by saying, “Every third thought shall be my grave.”

To sum up: what Shakespeare throughout his tragedies (and his comedies as well) teaches us about “fault” is briefly this: that whatever the circumstances, we are responsible for our actions; that we must avoid the beginnings of evil; that all fault is reprehensible; that when we do wrong we must repent, and make the only atonement, “a clear life ensuing.”—*The Tempest*, III. iii. 81.

We shall not be surprised, therefore, to learn that Shakespeare follows Aristotle only a very short way. He finds the theory insufficient; as soon as he gets to work he discovers that the word “fault” has gained enormously in significance during some two thousand years of our moral development; that, for example, it has come to mean some defect in our character which we ought to remedy, and *can if we choose*,¹ and if we do

¹ See the former quotations from *Othello* and *King Lear*, pages 188 and 189.

not so remedy our fault, we must expect serious consequences, not physical merely, but what Dr. Bradley calls "spiritual death," and Shakespeare "lingering perdition." The serious consequence, moreover, of this neglect is far-reaching, and it may involve others ; upon this, also, Shakespeare frequently insists. Already, therefore, we venture to change Aristotle's "undeservedly" to "deservedly."

But, fortunately, another change is possible ; not only is Brutus to move downwards from B to C, there is also an upward movement to be recognised, and that carefully ; for Lear, of Class B (or lower), ends by placing himself in Class A.¹ Apparently, therefore, Aristotle might have added, "But my intermediate character may be degraded to Class C or promoted to Class A." But this was hardly intended by Aristotle. In fact, nothing is more

¹ Here, indeed, is the true *κάθαρσις*, the purge, the purification, whether for dramatic character or for spectator. Let me quote the eloquent words of Dr. Bradley (of Lear) : "Whose sight is so purged by scalding tears that it sees at last how power and place and all things in the world are vanity, except love."

important or more striking in Shakespeare than his insistence on the truth, "Be sure your sin will find you out," nothing more certain than his punishment of evil and his maintenance of the doctrines of conscience, free will, moral responsibility, together with confession, repentance, atonement, and much besides that belongs to "Christian morality."

Here, then, already are two new principles established by Shakespeare ; that as regards Aristotle's "error or frailty," or "fault"—

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves";

and the second follows immediately, namely, that assumed gradations of fault are not permanent in drama any more than in actual life ; indeed, they are less permanent in the ideal life of drama. The grey-haired saint may fall, and the stiff neck may become loosened.

But further, "Repent what 's past," are the solemn words of Hamlet, "avoid what is to come." "Whose wrath 's To guard you from," said Ariel to the three men of sin, "is nothing but heart-sorrow, And a clear life

ensuing." So there follows a third new principle, that we must "make an internal survey of ourselves," repent, pray without ceasing, and work out our salvation ; for our movement from class to class should be and can be upward, and not downward, though certainly to climb is harder than to fall ; and we may even end by losing the power of climbing and repentance and prayer. "O wretched state," cried the half-penitent Claudius, " My words fly up, my thoughts remain below." But though some hearts may be hardened, or hardened in part ("throw away," said Hamlet, "the worser part of it, And live the purer with the other half ") the dramatist does not leave us without encouragement : " He that might the vantage best have took, Found out the remedy " ; " they being penitent The sole drift of my purpose doth extend Not a frown further."

Yet a fourth new principle is now established by Shakespeare. What is the good of moving upwards ? This equally we learn from the great moralist, that just as we pull others with us when we fall, so

others rise with our rising. "Heaven doth with us as we with torches do . . . Spirits are not finely touched, but to fine issues"—even till a character like Cordelia, as he solemnly assures us, fulfils the Biblical mission of Christ; for she

"Redeems nature from the general curse

Which twain have brought her to."

So much, then, we learn from Shakespeare's dealings with Aristotle and his three classes, and these are attestable facts. But there is more in it, and something still more important. For we have asked, "Why not pity Cordelia?" or should we say that virtue is its own reward? "But," . . . Sir Walter Raleigh remarks,¹ "good conduct is of no avail." What has Shakespeare to say to this, the most terrible problem of all? Does he, like Aristotle, regard the death of Cordelia as "shocking," and does he take comfort in "blaspheming the very foundations of life and sanity?"² By no means. We shall not even summon to our aid the

¹ *Shakespeare*, Men of Letters, p. 196.

² *Shakespeare*, Men of Letters, p. 211.

doctrine of his 146th Sonnet, that the flesh counts for little, and is sinful; that it imperils the immortal destinies of the soul, and that the only way of salvation is to pine the flesh and feast the spirit, till the very grave is robbed of its victory. We will not even stay to inquire whether that doctrine might serve us; enough will be explained by his tragic method, which we will now examine.

As it is impossible in tragedy to indicate or maintain gradations of fault,¹ so is it impossible to assign degrees of punishment. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"; Death, therefore, is a tragic convention, a symbol; the symbol of punishment for sin through all its gradations.² In the comedies

¹ "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," or, in Shakespeare thus: "All the souls that are were forfeit once."

² It is interesting to note, however, that Brutus, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, all commit murder, which also is a kind of tragic convention. Apart from the ideal, therefore, they all "deserve" their penalty. Lear, in his blindness, spurns the daughter and the servant who loved him, and Coriolanus takes up arms against his country; but, as we have seen, they repent, and are saved morally. The repentance of Othello, judged by the tragic ideal, came too late. As to Julius

punishment varies, *and is sometimes even severer* :—“ There are worse things waiting for men than death.”

Still, it is this tragic convention of death that chiefly separates the tragedies from the comedies, and makes them point their moral more sternly. But, strange as it may seem, this tragic ideal or symbol serves to point another moral. In comedy, love (as we may hope) “ lives happily ever after,” but it seems to be another tragic convention that love must die. Nor is the convention suggested by such phrases as “ Whom the gods love die young,” or Hamlet’s “ Absent thee from felicity awhile,” or again by the doctrine of Shakespeare’s sonnet referred to above ; applied to sin, death, in tragedy, is the ideal of penalty, but applied to

Cæsar, he fell through “ mortals’ chiefest enemy, security,” an overweening confidence in his own name : “ If my name were liable to fear.” So Brutus falls through a blind trust in “ the name of honour.” It is interesting to note further, that if Cæsar at the outset is heroic, Brutus is impossible ; therefore Cæsar is represented as a tyrant, and weak in body and mind. So also, as a foil to Brutus, Cassius is painted in colours that are unduly dark ; but when the play has run its half course, Cæsar and Cassius gain in dignity and glory.

goodness *it is the ideal of achievement.* For love implies sacrifice throughout life unto death, and the ideal death of love in tragedy only makes the sacrifice apparent. It remains merely to add the words of Shakespeare already quoted—

“ Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense ” ;
and what he says of one such character will apply, I believe, to all.

I do not pretend that I have exhausted the subject; fortunately it is inexhaustible, or the human “ achievement ” I have spoken of above would be an idle name. But I have endeavoured to point to some (but only some) of the moral considerations that Shakespeare, as it seems, has imposed upon Aristotle; and now we proceed to learn yet more of the truth by examining the following quotations from Mr. Beeching’s article—

(a) “ It is the very postulate of tragedy as a work of art, that impossible tasks¹

¹ This, as we shall see later, should read: “ Tasks that he might have performed, but did not choose to perform.” All conditional meanings of the word (as also of the “ test,” p. 201), its conventional and ideal aspects, are dealt with below. It

should be laid upon its heroes, else there could be no tragedy . . . the test must in every case be too severe for the hero. . . . The ethical presupposition of tragedy is sometimes denied, because those who assert it are supposed to mean that the tragic hero 'deserves' his fate."²

(b) "The tragedian expressly contrives or adopts a situation which, in real life, would probably never occur . . . tragedy is a work of art built upon certain conventions. . . . That being so, the main interest of Shakespeare's tragedies turns upon the character of the hero, as exhibited in the circumstances of the action ; in other words, it is an ethical interest. . . . Not in is not "impossibility" that makes tragedy, but "failure." Tragedy is a record of failure, not of impossibility, and the failure lies in the individual. (Page 203, footnote 2). *Shakespeare will not allow us to explain away "fault" with the aid of the words "undeserved" and "impossible."*

² Again I may anticipate. As explained below, the element of proportion must be eliminated ; the penalty may be too light, as well as too heavy ; with that we have nothing to do. As we shall see, there is no question of kind or degree of penalty, but of freedom from blame, of failure, of doing well or doing ill, of resisting evil or yielding to it, of standing or falling. See also the quotation on page 207, "Sufficient," etc.

the mere inconstancy of fortune, nor in any righteous retribution meted out to a splendid criminal, but in some fault of an heroic character who, for the most part, attracts our sympathy, and whose fall we commiserate . . . If we try to put into words our impression of almost any Shakespearean character, we find ourselves using terms of moral praise and blame . . . in the comedies we laugh. . . . That death does symbolise failure, and to that extent tragedy does deliver an ethical verdict."

(c) "To say, then, that the death of so noble a character as Brutus is an indictment of the moral order would be grotesque, when the dramatist shows us, in scene after scene, that the catastrophe really arises not from the hero's nobility¹ by itself, but

¹ I had better examine this attempt to separate the hero's "nobility" from his "fault." No man has two characters: when he commits a fault he commits it with his whole being. (If our right hand steals a loaf, we do not excuse our left hand, nor can we punish the right hand without the left hand feeling the punishment). Here we add Shakespeare—

"The dram of eale
Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
To his own scandal."

Again we must ask, "Does nobility in this

from what Aristotle calls his 'fault.' Despite all his virtues he has failed to meet the particular situation proposed by the dramatist.² If we are right in saying that it is some fault in the hero which lands him in disaster, is not the conclusion inevitable that in the dramatist the controlling destiny is a power that makes for righteousness and wisdom?"

It must, I think, be evident that these quotations carry us through Dr. Bradley's three gradations from the "strictly æsthetic," or fatalist position, to the moral view.³

passage connote goodness," or only "greatness"? It should be only the latter. As in a former note, a 'fault' is less excusable in those of high estate; once more, "it behoves the high For their own sakes to do things worthily."

² "The gray-hair'd saint may fall at last, The surest guide a wanderer prove." (Henry VIII and Queen Mary were good enough, I believe, at the outset). He fails for one of two reasons: either because the task was impossible, and he therefore a puppet in the hands of fate, and irresponsible; or because the task was possible, and he therefore a free agent, and responsible for his actions. Mr. Beeching, I assume, will not admit the former alternative, and as to the latter, whatever virtues the character may have had (see footnote 2, p. 181), may not check the tragic issue.

³ (1) The strictly æsthetic. (2) A confusion of æsthetic and moral. (3) The exclusively moral.

In (*a*) Mr. Beeching assumes the first position, which has to be abandoned sooner or later, and his language is not unlike that of Dr. Bradley, which we must recall for a moment—

“ If we do not feel at times that the power which they cannot escape is relentless and immovable, we have failed to receive an essential part of the tragic effect.” Here Sir Walter Raleigh, following, seems nevertheless to go astray: “ What they suffer is out of all proportion to what they do and are. They are presented with a choice, and the essence of the tragedy is that choice is impossible.” This surely is a mistake;¹ but returning to Mr. Beeching, if as premise we take the word *impossible* (extract *a*) then our conclusion must be “ undeserved,” which is really the position of Aristotle.

¹ Oddly enough, Mr. Beeching quotes part of this: “ They are presented with a choice, and the essence of the tragedy is that choice is impossible.” We need not have recourse to formal logic in dealing with this error. Can we be *presented with a choice* if the choice is *impossible*? It looks no better the other way round: if choice is impossible, surely we cannot be presented with choice?

Everything, as I said before, turns on this word "undeserved." After the postulate *impossible* (*a*) it is vain to speak of *character*, or to use the words *praise* or *blame* (*b*) ; and yet, as Dr. Bradley admits, we do sit in judgment sooner or later.¹

Consequently, therefore, from this first position we have a gradual shifting in (*b*) which includes an earnest but unavailing apology for Aristotle, and in which we begin our praise or blame ; once more, it is not a question of mode of punishment or of amount of punishment, but of punishment, of desert. Was the character free from all blame ?

¹ I wish to be fair in my exposition of what I venture to regard as debatable, and therefore I will here mention the theory of Dr. Bradley, that when we read or listen to a tragedy we must temporarily "rid ourselves of our every-day legal and moral notions"—in other words, that when we enter a theatre, we must leave our consciences outside. This, I venture to think, is not unlike Mr. Beeching's theory in the article from which these extracts are taken, that we judge a lyric poem quite apart from its relation to morality. That is to say, we must reverse the process of human development till we reach a stage before moral ideas existed, and forget that *those ideas helped to make our present faculty of appreciation, and are part of it.* But see also the essay, "Shakespeare and His Critics," pp. 134-141.

Did he do all in his power to avert his doom? Was he a puppet or a free agent? Is he to receive praise or blame? Did he make that internal survey of himself, and repent what was past, avoid what was to come? Did he pray without ceasing, and work out his salvation with fear and trembling, if so it must be? Briefly and bluntly, failure in (*b*) has no meaning when it faces the *impossible* of (*a*). It can have a meaning only when we substitute *possible* for *impossible*; already we have the *non sequitur*.

But here Mr. Beeching will correct me: "This is not a matter of real life," he will urge, "but of convention, of the ideal." But I reply: "We cannot carry a premise into your ideal world, and leave its conclusion behind us; a postulate in that ideal world is as valid as a postulate in the real world. In your ideal world the same logic must hold: if *impossible*, we "pity and fear"; if *possible*, we "praise or blame."

I will try to meet every conceivable objection, and again Mr. Beeching may object: "But you are not supposed to

know at the outset that my conditions are impossible." Again I reply : " As soon as we discover (and discover we must, and without delay) that your conditions are impossible, we indignantly dismiss the whole trick. But, what is more, *we have a right to know beforehand* the conditions that exist in your world, or it has no interest, no value for us."

Yet more, the figure of a test as employed by Mr. Beeching in this article serves us nothing. It must be dealt with by the same reasoning. If we go to an ideal world to apply a test, and the test is admittedly too severe, "impossible," then, there as here, it is no test at all.

And now, leaving all argument, I will put the truth in homelier fashion. A father wishes to test his son's obedience. He does not ask the boy to carry a horse, but bids him go to school half an hour earlier than usual, and awaits the result ; and the boy is—

"Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall."

Here we have the logic and the law of either world, the real or the ideal, life or drama—with this difference, however, that in the real world a father is not likely to send his son to school half an hour before the time, and certainly not to make death a punishment for disobedience.

And now, finally, I have merely to repeat some of the words in extract (c) of Mr. Beeching's article, “A fault that lands a hero in disaster because the controlling power makes for righteousness, is a fault that ‘deserves’ its fate.” But these, the moral standpoint, are almost the words of Shakespeare, and I now quote them fearlessly—

“ Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to heaven ; the fated
sky
Gives us free scope, only doth backward
pull
Our slow designs, when we ourselves
are dull.”

Even the best of us, I may add, are unprofitable servants—

“ The best of what we do and are,
Just God, forgive,”

and as to the rest of us, the indifferent : " What should such fellows as I do," said Hamlet, " crawling between earth and heaven ? "

What, then, is the conclusion ? Briefly this, that however we may postulate of Shakespeare fatalism, pessimism, and indifference to all questions and aspirations of ethics, we must end by admitting him to have been a great moral teacher, a believer in being good and doing good, a believer in free will, moral responsibility and a beneficent Providence—everything, indeed, that was included in a code of morality, upon which, as some of us think, no definite advance has been made.

VI

SHAKESPEARE'S ARTISTIC METHODS

ELSEWHERE I have written generally of Shakespeare as a literary artist, but in this supplementary essay I will take the opportunity of presenting one or two examples of his artistic methods, in order to illustrate his astute dealings with insuperable difficulties, and his consummate skill under more tractable conditions. My examples under the first of these heads will be the characters of Cressida and Henry the Fifth, and for the secnd I will choose the incomparable opening of Mark Antony's oration.

I.

THE REAL TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

Most people, I believe, who read the above heading will have ready in mind what I shall

endeavour to show is an entirely false estimate of the play: Cressida will be "from the outset a wanton coquette," and Troilus "a green goose."

The critics, indeed, with the possible exception of Coleridge, are unanimous in their condemnations of Cressida—"from first to last she is consistent in levity of character," "the harlotries of the eponymous heroine," "spiritually repulsive and unclean," "a light of love," etc., etc.; and as our two most recent critics fall into what I must regard as the same error, and actually compare Cressida to Doll Tearsheet, it is time that an attempt should be made to set forth the plain fact.

We may open the case by examining Shakespeare's treatment of Cressida, and, like the judge who investigates murder, we will begin with the question of motive; and, as it happens, no play of Shakespeare so reasonably invites an inquiry into motive as this of *Troilus and Cressida*.

The poet's general underlying purpose may come first. We shall find it in *Hamlet*, that magnificent overture of all the tragedies.

There we read, "Frailty, thy name is woman." We read also—

" Witness this army, of such mass and charge,
 Exposing what is mortal and unsure
 To all that fortune, death, and danger
 dare,
 Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be
 great
 Is not to stir without great
 argument. . . ."

The corresponding passages in *Troilus and Cressida* are, "Ah, frail our sex!" and the following: "All the argument is a cuckold and a whore; a good quarrel to draw emulous factions and bleed to death upon."

Again—

" 'Tis mad idolatry
 To make the service greater than the
 god,
 And the will dotes, that is attributive
 To what infectiously itself affects
 Without some image of the affected
 merit."

Shorter still we have it in the many times repeated "wars and lechery" of the *chorus* of the play, Thersites. Such, then, is the

main argument of this satirical drama, which may otherwise be classed as one of the dramas of disillusion.

After stating this double and general motive, we must ask what Shakespeare intended by his sketch of Cressida. This is obvious, to follow Chaucer's poem (*Troilus and Cressida*), pretty closely, while he paints dramatically for all time the picture of inconstancy in woman. "Revolted Cressida" —the picture, that is to say, of a woman who falls away from love, from first love, from true love; for all this, as we shall see, comes within his scope. And even thus early we may hazard the remark that a *wanton* cannot be *false*. Yet, while we are thankful that Shakespeare avoided this difficulty, we admit that he thereby encountered another, and this, as we shall see later, he failed altogether to surmount.

Also at this point we should notice a secondary purpose, which enters into the general motive of the play, namely, to

¹ "Let all constant men be Troiluses, all false women Cressids, and all brokers - between Pandars."

assign the *rôle* of villain to a Greek. In other plays this honour is often reserved for an Italian.

With regard to Troilus (see also footnote, p. 214) it may be mentioned that Shakespeare wishes to exhibit love as something unworthy of the serious business of life, and even detrimental to it. This again is an off-growth of the main motive. In a passing mood, and not like Bacon from morose conviction, Shakespeare would tell us that the stage is more beholding to love than life itself ; that great men and great actions keep the treacherous passion strictly aloof, and finally each writer quotes the adage, “ To be wise and love exceeds man’s might.”

From this we pass to the relation between motive and fable. Shakespeare, as we all know, is seldom content with a single plot. In this play he gives us two slightly related stories, and, after his usual manner, makes them mutually illuminating. But not quite in the way of main plot and underplot ; rather, he paints side by side, and on an equal canvas, two pictures ; the one is that of an individual, the other of a community

torn by “the cruel madness of love.” And as in *Julius Cæsar* Portia is to Brutus as he to patriotism, so in this play Cressida is to Troilus as Helen to “the ten years’ war in Troy.”

But all this is a later development, due to what I have called Shakespeare’s passing mood, which came in with *Hamlet*. Had he written, or finished, his play ten years earlier he might have begun and ended with Chaucer. Indeed, the Cressida portion of his drama up to iv. iv. 110 has the appearance of earlier work; also, as we shall see below, it is a beautiful story of pure and true love, and when later it was combined with the war story, each, as I venture to think, became caricature.

From the play itself I will now give in outline what I have spoken of as a beautiful story of pure and true love.

First (although it was the love dearest to Shakespeare, “love at first sight,” iii. ii. 121–9), the wooing has been a very long affair; even Pandarus gets impatient at his niece’s reluctance. “Still have I tarried,” sighs Troilus. “You must stay

the cooling too," replies Pandarus; "our kindred, though they be long ere they are wooed, they are constant, being won." "She is stubborn-chaste against all suit," complains Troilus elsewhere; and later, from Cressida herself, we have the genuine confession—

" Prince Troilus, I have loved you night
and day
For many weary months."

None who read the play carefully can doubt that such is the very truth; yet this is the woman whom many critics pronounce "from the first a wanton." Moreover, we gather from the play, if we gather anything at all, that this is her first love, and that she is a virgin. Those who wish for one reference among many can turn to iv. ii. 24.

Next, her supposed coarseness. Alexander dared not talk to her as Parolles did to Helena. Only to her uncle and guardian did she speak the conventional speech of nine-tenths of the heroines of Shakespeare, and she dates back hundreds of years from any of these. For her uncle she has the

familiarity of contempt ; she humours him much as Hamlet humours Polonius ; but she rebukes his attempts at coarseness, and will not encourage, as Ophelia did. She rebukes him : “ For shame, peace ! ” She tells the man that she would wish to rely upon him as the defender of her honour, but that he acts more like a go-between. “ A pestilence on him,” she says ; “ would he were knocked i’ the head.” Only with her near relative, I repeat, does she allow herself even the conventional freedom of Shakespeare’s day ;¹ not a word that she utters to any other character, or on any other occasion, but is as modest as Miranda’s. Again, I speak of the story of love which ends with iv. iv. 110, though, indeed, *there is nothing of coarseness in what follows*, nothing that will compare with the talk of Helen in iii. i.

And as to the story of her love, I shall repeat without any reservation that for purity and modesty it is matched only by Miranda’s ; with this it may be compared

¹ It may be less to our purpose to say that if Pandarus is to be Pandarus, Cressida could say and do no other.

at all points but one, for it contains far more of the priceless element of—

“ Modest pride,
And sweet, reluctant, amorous delay.”

Cressida's only fault is the womanly virtue of “ holding off ” (I. ii. 312). In Miranda's case, Prospero himself had to interpose, “ lest too light winning Make the prize light.”

That the rest of my narrative must be told by a few quotations is of little concern to me. I am convinced that most of us will wish to read or read again this exquisite story of pure young passion—

“ Upon my secrecy, to defend mine honesty
. . .” (*i.e.*, honour)

“ Yet hold I off. Women are angels,
wooing. . . .”

(*i.e.* a woman cannot be too slow to surrender; “ too light winning makes the prize light ”; “ the man is true that has to woo ”; “ Men are April when they woo, December when they wed.”)

“ Then though my heart's content firm
love doth bear,
Nothing of that shall from mine eyes
appear.”

“ She does so blush, and fetches her wind so short . . . she fetches her breath as short as a new-ta'en sparrow . . . what need you blush ? . . . What, blushing still ? ”

“ O heavens ! What have I done ?
For this time will I take my leave, my lord.”

“ My lord, will you be true ? ”

With this pathetic appeal the story ends.
What follows belongs to another woman.

It will be asked, “ But if Cressida was pure and true, how could she consent to an unlawful love ? ” And this brings me to the most important part of my inquiry. No critic, so far as I am aware, has noticed that she is *formally betrothed to Troilus*, but it will be plain to all who read III. ii. 204-12.

Now we must remember that at the time of writing—some years, I think, previous to 1602—Shakespeare, like his contemporaries generally, was inclined to regard betrothal as a legal substitute for marriage ; a few years later he has definite doubts on the subject. This will be clear to all who compare his opinions as they are expressed in *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*. At

this time, however, and possibly with his own experience in mind, he regards betrothal as sufficient, especially when referred to the matrimonial customs of ancient Troy. This is one of the many touches that make his sketch infinitely superior to Chaucer's, in which the betrothal scene is far more faintly outlined.

Such, then, is the Cressida whom Shakespeare is to represent as inconstant—"revolted Cressida"; but the revolt is inconceivable. For this woman, in whom first love is a sacred passion, in whom there is not so much as a hint of inconstancy, whose life, indeed, is "a perfumed altar flame"—this woman, *in a matter of two or three hours*, is to be transformed into one of the "daughters of the game." Impossible. Then why has Shakespeare attempted the impossible? We turn to Chaucer. He recognised the difficulty, and it gave him such serious trouble that he confessed himself baffled. He tries to qualify the revolt—

" How Criseyde Troilus forsook,
Or at the leeste, how that she was
unkinde."

He tries delay, postpones the suit of Diomede for ten days, insists on the Greek craft of the seducer, represents Cressida as persistent in putting him off; and finally the poet takes refuge in the varying versions of the story, and then concludes—

“Men seyn, I not,—that she yaf hym hire herte.”

In other words, “I cannot make head or tail of the rest of the story.”

No such expedients were possible to Shakespeare. He was a dramatist, hence chiefly the great and grotesque wrong done to his Cressida, and to art. Yet here let me point out that the wrong done by Chaucer to his Cressida—her dealings, for example, with Pandarus—are far greater, and they are loathsome and irreparable; loathsome and irreparable, even though she is a widow. (How came that widow in? *The Tempest*, II. i. 77. Shakespeare knew even better than Chaucer how to tell a love story, and improve on his authorities, and he kept the widow out.)

I now come to the second division of my

subject. How is Cressida spoken of by the other characters in the play? Surely Ulysses condemns her as a strumpet. We shall see.

First, as regards the story before the revolt, we have but one item of testimony to examine; it is the passage where (III. i. 46–110) Paris speaks of her as “My disposer Cressida.” This passage seems to be a little out of order; some parts are, I think, transposed. Next, the word “my” is played upon twice by Pandarus (“your”), and therefore may be equivalent to “Troilus’s.” Thirdly, the exact meaning of the word “disposer” in this context cannot be determined. This single and very doubtful item of evidence may therefore be set aside.¹

As to the censure of Ulysses, it comes *after* the “revolt”; it is formed on the spur of the moment, from what he has just seen and heard; beyond this he knows nothing whatever of her—

¹ Again, it is less to my purpose to remark that if Cressida had been a notorious wanton, Troilus would have had nothing to do with her.

" *Ulyss.* : As gentle tell me, of what honour
was

This Cressida in Troy ? Had she no
lover there

That wails her absence ? . . .

Troil. : She was beloved, she loved ; she
is, and doth. . . ."

When we reflect that this conversation comes a good deal later than the foregoing judgment of Ulysses, we contemptuously dismiss his evidence.¹

As to any other and slighter opinions put forward by the characters, they also are formed after the revolt, and are false to the tenor of the narrative.

The incidents that follow this abrupt change of personality do not fall within the scope of my inquiry. Nevertheless, it would be easy to show that their importance has been grossly exaggerated.

We now proceede to Shakespeare's presentation of Troilus, and this will not detain us long. " I cannot come to Cressid but by

¹ Contrast, for example, his " That give accosting welcome ere it comes," with the timid confession of a love that had loved " many weary months," and in silence.

Pandar." This is nine-tenths of the whole matter; for Pandar, as we have seen, was both uncle and guardian. The other tenth will be discovered by all who care to take a glance at Chaucer's "green goose"—the maudlin, whining dolt who thanks Pandar for his filthy services, and who acts meanly, contemptibly, and of course we must add "mediævally." For Chaucer writes in the mediæval fashion, which mostly allows a more or less sickly convention to expel both morality and nature.¹

Before I conclude, I must say a few words about Pandarus; and here, by a reference to Chaucer, Shakespeare is seen even to better advantage. Besides the relationship and guardianship urged already, we need scarcely add that a man who takes a pride in the engagement of his niece, stipulates that she is pure, asserts that she will be constant, being won, and is careful that the alliance shall be sanctioned by formal betrothal—such a man is no pandar of the ordinary type. Those who wish to know what a pandar is,

¹ It might be added that Troilus, like Hamlet, seems to change his personality somewhat as the play proceeds.

and to turn sick at the knowledge, should read the story in Chaucer. In Shakespeare, even at the close of the play, Pandarus has little enough of the professional.

Finally, let anyone otherwise unacquainted with Shakespeare read this play for the first time as far as iv. iv. 110, and he will assert that the story is of first love, pure love, and true love ; that it has no parallel even in Shakespeare, except the love of Ferdinand and Miranda. Let him then read the remainder of the play, and he will pronounce it utterly impossible.

* * * *

What must be Shakespeare's apology. He has erred, certainly, but "in his own grand way." How grand will be best understood by those who read the mixed beauty, banality, and prolixity of Chaucer's poem after Shakespeare's drama.

II.

THE CHARACTER OF HENRY THE FIFTH.

Shakespeare is justly celebrated for his delineation of character ; it happens,

nevertheless, that he sometimes creates his leading dramatic personalities out of the most incongruous elements. As instances I may mention Ophelia, Caliban, Cressida, and Henry the Fifth. These discrepancies on Shakespeare's part are due mostly to an excessive regard for his authorities, and to an attempt to combine in one personage as many peculiarities or "humours" as possible. This will be clearly seen in the character I propose to examine, viz. his early ideal of man and King and Englishman, Henry the Fifth.

We cannot get a whole character from the play known generally as *King Henry V*, although the Folio title is *The Life of King Henry V*; however we might be tempted, it would scarcely be safe to interpret: "Here is the man; seek him not in *Henry IV*," for such titles are customary in the Folio.

As a fact, Shakespeare's sketch of this "unthrifty son" begins in the play of *Richard II*, where the colours used are darkest—

" As dissolute as desperate ; yet through
 both
 I see some sparks of better hope, which
 elder years
 May happily bring forth."

Richard II, v. iii. 19-21.¹

We have here no suggestion whatever of assumed wildness, that time-honoured and popular dramatic motive ; but ultimately the character is reared on two foundations, *re-formation* and *transformation*. Either of these was a possible yet doubtful basis ; but the attempt to build on them both involved, as we shall see, immense risk to consistency, if not complete artistic and moral failure.

¹ That the life of Henry V begins in this earlier play, and that it was the main motive of the two parts of *Henry IV* is proved by the prominence given to the subject at the opening of 1 *Henry IV* (i. i. 84-90), and by the express statement of the *Induction* to the Second Part—

" I run before King Henry's victory," etc.
(i.e. Shrewsbury).

Also the close relation between 2 *Henry IV* and *Henry V* is emphasised at the end of the former (v. v. 113-15). We may note also how Shakespeare glosses over the striking of the judge. Falstaff makes light of it, and Henry himself avoids mention of it till he has " imitated the sun."

It is perhaps instructive to note how commentators one after another have shut their eyes to the facts I am about to mention, or have remained blind to them ; more than one volume could be filled with their attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable. But an author's meaning must be found only in what he has written ; apart from this, his meaning or meanings are as nothing to us.¹ Attempts such as the foregoing are barely criticism ; they have no place in science. What should be said of the geologist who came upon a "fault" in his strata, and ignored it both in his diagrams and in his letterpress ? And these "faults" occur not infrequently in Shakespeare's dramatic strata. In the delineation of character, especially, as we have seen, he is liable to multiply feature and confuse motive ; and to the examples above mentioned we might add Falstaff (as in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*), and perhaps even his analysis-defying Hamlet and Iago.

¹ Further, the evidence supplied by one character is as weighty as that supplied by any other.

This is not to belittle Shakespeare, but merely to confess that he is, occasionally, a mortal.

Returning to the double personality of Henry V, I will now cite two passages in support of my statement, and in each instance they may be accepted on the best authority, that of Henry himself—

- (a) “ My father is gone wild into his grave,
For in his tomb lie my affections.”
2 Henry IV, v. ii. 124-5.

“ Affections ” in this passage means evil passions, evil disposition, misconduct ; it is the “ wildness ” of *Henry V*, i. i. 26, and it appears in the “ wilder days ” of i. ii. 267 in the same play. From these two lines and their context we clearly learn that the Prince had been a reprobate, and meant to reform.

- (b) “ Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious
clouds
To smother up his beauty from the
world,
That, when he please again to be
himself,
Being wanted, he may be more
wonder’d at,

By breaking through the foul and
ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle
him."

i Henry IV, I. ii. 221-7.

From this passage we learn as clearly that the wildness was assumed.

These two traditions, of reformation¹ and transformation,² might be further distinguished as the Becket type and the Brutus type; in fact, we have the latter in *Henry V*, II. iv. 36-8.

" His vanities forespent
Were but the outside of the Roman
Brutus,
Covering discretion with a coat of
folly."

The tradition was especially dear to Shakespeare at this time—the tradition, that is, of an "antic disposition," assumed for a set purpose; it becomes one of the main motives of *Hamlet*, and enters also into the scheme of *King Lear*. The other

¹ Cf. " My reformation, glittering o'er my fault."
i Henry IV, I. ii. 237.

² The word used by Shakespeare in reference to Hamlet, Richard II, and others.

tradition is a yet older one, old as the first man—

“ Whose youth was full of foolish noise,
Who wears his manhood hale and
green ”;

the tradition, that is, of a notable personage who, to the surprise of everyone, sows his wild oats, or who renounces his lighter life as he accepts some weighty responsibility. We may speak of this as a tradition, although such men are not more famous in fiction than in fact.²

At first these traditions are accepted indifferently by Shakespeare, and their conflict is ignored ; at times, again, we are not sure as to which is in the poet's mind : “ I have turn'd away my former self ” (*2 Henry IV*, v. v. 62) : “ Being awaked, I do despise my dream ” (*Ibid.*, l. 55). But when he sets to work on the play of *Henry V*, which is to give a portrait of an ideal king, who should have spent an ideal youth, the need for some sort of consistency is forced upon him. He must choose between his traditions ; therefore at the very outset of

² Charles XII of Sweden, Robert Clive, etc.

his drama he makes a strained effort not only to announce his choice, but also to defend his former trifling with a serious dilemma. But the most generous reader will be slow to admit that the speeches of Canterbury and Ely remove the difficulty, although Ely, after agreeing as it would seem with Canterbury's elaborate theory of reformation, briefly suggests the "veil of wildness," to which Canterbury assents, because "miracles are ceased."

On the other hand, that Shakespeare is still possessed by the Becket tradition is abundantly evident throughout the play. We have (I. ii. 270), "Did give ourself To barbarous license," "Our wilder days" (l. 267), "His youth and vanity," "The promise of his greener days" (II. iv. 130 and 136); and we have both together in the lines already quoted—

" His vanities forespent
Were but the outside of the Roman
Brutus."

Possibly we might add, "He passes some humours and careers" (II. i. 132), which appears to mean, "The king often changes

his disposition, as he now changes his treatment of Falstaff."

Let us now inquire what the poet gains by his presumptive choice of the Brutus tradition. It seemed to be both more plausible and more impressive. "Miracles are ceased," said Canterbury. "Such reformation following on such persistent wildness should be impossible." On the other hand, "He quenched his wantonness," writes Holinshed.

Besides, granting that the wantonness was wholly assumed, could it possibly, as Shakespeare so often implies, have been contemporaneous with "all the courses of his (Henry's) youth?"

Next, could the assumed good effected by the transformation outweigh the actual evil that was involved—a contempt of right and law, a renunciation of responsibility, a sacrifice of duty, and the breaking of a father's heart—

"Thy life did manifest thou lovedst me
not,

And thou wilt have me die assured of it."

2 Henry IV, iv. v. 105-6.

And lastly, was it sound art to adopt such a basis of character as this Brutus element? Certainly the tradition was famous, and might possibly have moral as well as dramatic worth; but the following important facts have yet to be stated: given the assumption of wantonness, what was the motive? Here, as I venture to think, the inconsistency of the dramatist is most plainly apparent; for at least three different motives are alleged. First—

“ Yet herein will I imitate the sun,” etc., as in the passage quoted above (*i Henry IV*, i. ii. 221-7); that is to say, the jewel of Henry’s kingly virtue will be set off by the dark background of “the former days.” Second—

“ The prince but studies his companions
Like a strange tongue, wherein, to gain
the language,
’Tis needful that the most immodest
word
Be look’d upon and learn’d.”
2 Henry IV, iv. iv. 68-71.

Again—

“ The prince obscured his contemplation
Under the veil of wildness.”

Henry V, i. i. 63-4.

That is, “hid his serious observation of life under the mask of wanton indifference.” These two passages, we may note, come nearest to the Hamlet motive. But then we have thirdly—

“ We never valued this poor seat of England ;
And therefore, living hence, did give
ourselves
To barbarous license ; as ‘tis ever
common
That men are merriest when they are
from home.”

Henry V, I. ii. 269-72.

Here the meaning is, “I could afford to be wild, for the throne of great France, not of little England, was my ambition ; therefore France, and not England, was my home ; and therefore again, till I gained France, and so reached my true home, I did as men away from home usually do—made merry with the time.” But into this strange motive a new element enters, that, namely, of the *deliberate assumption* of a dissolute life.

More could be said on this subject, but perhaps I have now carried my analysis far enough to show that on this occasion Shakespeare has over-reached himself ; and I may add that a similar method of analysis might be applied in some other instances with a like result.

And yet, once more, Shakespeare always remains Shakespeare, and to my thinking the discovery of an occasional weakness serves chiefly to remind us of his general strength and to appreciate it more fully. Often enough the microscope, while it detects one slight blemish, will reveal a world of beauty. This follows also, that if we have not been able to discern the weakness neither have we been able to realise the full measure of the strength ; or, as in this instance, to confess that Shakespeare has sketched an ideal hero, Christian and king ; that in the person of Henry the Fifth he has embodied the principles dearest to all who bear the name of Englishmen, the principles of national unity, national heroism, national virtue, and national greatness.

III.

MARK ANTONY'S ORATION.¹

Famous as it may be, this marvel of rhetoric is sometimes imperfectly understood. In the library we do not always recognise what leads up to it, and on the stage the first half dozen lines are generally, as I venture to think, enfeebled or utterly spoilt.

To say that the speech illustrates the principles and employs the devices of all known oratory up to its day is by no means sufficient for an intelligent appreciation. We must consult its originals, compare the speech of Brutus, and then carefully examine the intervals that follow.

First, as usual, we find hints for both speeches in the authorities consulted by the dramatist, hints for their manner, indeed, as well as their matter. To begin with the occasion and the matter: “Brutus and his confederates came into the market-place to speak unto the people. . . . The

¹ In regard to this paper, which was written many years ago, I believe I am indebted to one or two writers whose names I cannot recall.

multitude, rakehels of all sorts, had a goodwill to make some stir ; yet being ashamed to do it for the reverence they bare unto Brutus they kept silence to hear what he would say." (*Cf.* "Hear me for my cause, and be silent that you may hear.") Appian, moreover, supplies the "proud and confident interrogations of Brutus, and his pausing for a reply"; and the main argument is in Plutarch : "Brutus preferring the respect of his country and commonwealth before private affection," etc. Next, as to the manner. The style of his speech and its brevity are more than suggested in Plutarch. "In some of his epistles he counterfeited that brief, compendious manner of the Lacedæmonians, as, when the war was begun he wrote to the Pergamenians in this sort : 'I understand you have given Dolabella money ; if you have done it willingly, you confess you have offended me ; if against your wills, show it by giving me willingly.' This was Brutus' manner of letters, which were honoured for their brevity." Under this head we might add the following from Cicero's

letters to Atticus: “ Nullas unquam ad me litteras misit Brutus in quibus non esset arrogans ἀκοινώνητον aliquid.” Prose, therefore, and a balanced and laconic style were offered to Shakespeare, however much he may have added thereto from the ever-available but more carefully concealed stores of his Euphuism.

Again, with regard to Antony’s oration, Shakespeare found in Plutarch not a little of material and guidance—“the ancient custom of praising noble men at their funerals . . . perceiving that his words moved the common people to compassion, he framed his eloquence to make their hearts yearne the more . . . he mingled his oration with lamentable words ; and *by amplifying of matters* did greatly move their hearts and affections unto pity and compassion. In fine, to conclude his oration he unfolded before the whole assembly the bloody garments of the dead, thrust through in many places with their swords, and called the malefactors cruel and accursed murtherers.” And it is more than probable that Cicero furnished the doubtful and

varying emphasis laid by the speaker on the "honourable men." Further hints for the style of the speech were also to be found in Plutarch : " He used a manner of phrase in his speech called Asiatic, which carried the best grace and estimation at that time, and was much like to his manners and life ; for it was full of ostentation, foolish bravery, and vain ambition."

To this we should add that hints for the varying attitude of the mob in the case of either speaker were derived by Shakespeare from his originals.

But although in this, as in almost every other instance, we discover at least the suggestion, we yet acknowledge with profound admiration the transfiguring and embellishing achievements of genius.¹ We note Shakespeare's art in making Antony the last speaker. He would thus have an enormous advantage. Brutus, moreover, forgets that he is haranguing a

¹ (Possibly, however, each of these remarkable speeches is marred by a pun). The subject of Shakespeare's borrowings, their variety, their extent, and his way of dealing with authorities, should fill a volume.

mindless and wavering mob ; perhaps he prided himself on his control over emotion, and (in keeping with all his other actions) believed that he was addressing an assembly of philosophers ; for all that, his "verbal jugglery, false logic, and subtle distinctions would scarcely have obtained a hearing in the Senate." Antony, on the other hand, makes a passionate appeal to the emotions of the wavering multitude, and in this he is more than successful. But in passing we note two touches of Shakespeare's irony. In spite of a speech that can mean nothing to them, the mob immediately come over to Brutus, so easily is their baser metal moved ; and what is more astounding, just as Brutus might well think his calm and impartial reasoning had made every man of them a republican rigid as himself, and like himself rejoicing at the removal of the absolute ruler, he hears these very words shouted from the throng : "Let him be Cæsar!"

It has often been remarked by way of admiration of this speech of Brutus, that as he warms with his theme his language becomes more metrical, till at last it is

almost—or quite—poetry. As testimony to the high purposes and qualities of verse this may be instructive, but it can only be a blemish on the speech itself; any halting between poetry and prose is a nondescript species of composition, altogether beyond the bounds of art.

In Antony's speech, on the contrary, everything is perfection—language, style, manner and matter; as we reach the end of it we feel tempted to exclaim, “much less than this would have turned the tide against Brutus.” But we notice first of all that the speech does not begin with the well-known “Friends, Romans,” etc. The orator was far too skilful to thrust himself upon his audience, and this is the opening line, if not of the actual speech from the Rostra, at least of his appeal to the mob: “For Brutus' sake I am beholding to you.”

But the interval between the speeches calls for careful consideration. Brutus went into the pulpit first to “show the reason,” “render public reasons,” and so forth; and the speech over, he assures his friends, “What Antony shall speak, I will protest

He speaks by leave and by permission." And to Antony he gives these solemn directions—

" You shall not in your funeral speech
blame us,
But speak all good you can devise of
Cæsar,
And say you do 't by our permission."

Next we take into account Antony's views of the situation—

" Here is . . . a dangerous Rome ;
There shall I try,
In my oration, how the people take
The cruel issue of these bloody men."

Further, we have to remember how Brutus, as usual, harped on his honour, and that the charge he brought against Cæsar was, " He was ambitious."

The next stage in the proceedings is marked by the self-assured words of Brutus to the mob : "*For my sake*" (note that Antony repeats this) " stay here with Antony . . . grace his speech *Tending to Cæsar's glories* ; which Mark Antony *By our permission*, is allow'd to make."¹

¹ Here we note another mistake : Brutus departs alone, and leaves the field to Antony.

And now we have the clue to what, as pointed out above, is really the first line : “ For Brutus’ sake, I am beholding to you,” which may be interpreted, “ Thanks to the permission, nay, to the wish, of Brutus, I shall be indebted to you all for listening to me.” Only thus (though with concealed irony) could Antony hope to secure a hearing. He has authority for speaking, an authority they will not, cannot, dispute.

But not even yet have we reached the popular first line. Angry voices have to be silenced, hence a second appeal—

“ You gentle Romans”—

where “ gentle ” means “ high-souled,” “ noble,” ay, even “ nobly born.” How could the crowd resist this confidence in their nobility ? And there follows the unanimous shout, “ Peace, ho ! let us hear him ! ” While in figurative language,¹ “ lend me your ears,” so much more powerful than abstract, he makes good their resolution to listen.

¹ Contrast with the blunt, almost rude, “ Be silent, that you may hear,” of Brutus.

He begins then with soothing, flattering words, and in a manner hesitating and deprecating. As to the climax, "Friends, Romans, countrymen," here, too, Antony has the advantage.¹ It contrasts favourably with the "Romans, countrymen and lovers" of Brutus,¹ who should have put the "lovers" first; and later in his speech he more aptly ends with, "Who is here so vile that will not love his country?" Next we note that the pronoun "me" in Mark Antony's first line is absolutely without emphasis, without even accent; to lay the slightest stress on the word—or on the "I" of the following line—would be to insult and incense the mob, and the speaker would probably have been torn to pieces; yet this has been altogether overlooked—at least so far as I may judge from actors and others who lay an enormous stress on the two pronouns, and thus destroy the purport and the effect of the whole speech. Indeed, we must be rather sparing of our accents for several lines to come, as suits an address

¹ Cf. the "Romans, friends, followers," of *Titus Andronicus*.

at present wholly tentative.¹ Nor may any stress as yet be laid on “ambitious” (l. 6), nor on “honourable” in lines 10 and 11; there must be no suspicion of resentment, none of irony; there will be plenty of both later on.

But now we return to the beginning, and note with what a refinement of artfulness the speaker disclaims any intention to avail himself of the permission, or rather the command of Brutus, to “speak all good you can devise of Cæsar.”² He will not presume so far on the evidence of their senses; what good should he devise concerning a man who

¹ I may as well give what I believe to be the accentuation of the first few lines (the number of dashes is intended to denote the varying strength of accent)—

“ Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your
 / ears ;
 / I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him.
 // The evil that men do lives after them ;
 // The good is oft interred with their bones ;
 / So let it be with Cæsar. The noble Brutus
 / Hath told you Cæsar was ambitious . . . ”

² Or, “tending to Cæsar’s glories;” iv. ii. 63.

had been put to death for enslaving a free people? Certainly he was that man's friend, and as a friend he would discharge the customary funeral dues, omitting, however, all panegyric; that must be his business; let them not suppose that he was going to "disprove what Brutus spoke." *And yet* (the words come casually, musingly, inquiringly, a little sadly)—*and yet*—

"The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their
bones."

Now, I have supplied the "and yet"; any such words at present would have been too dangerous, too argumentative for Antony, who must omit, moreover, the "whereas" that tacitly connects the two lines; its presence would give the appearance of drawing a conclusion, and destroy the effect of a chance reflection.

And so I might go on to discuss line after line of this marvellous speech; but my task must end here, and the hints I have supplied may possibly enable us to follow the speaker with interest and appreciation to the end of his discourse.

A word on Shakespeare's politics as illustrated by these two speeches. I think we have rather to discover in this drama of *Julius Cæsar* two important elements—Plutarch, and the determination to write an interesting play. Spite of the passage in *Antony and Cleopatra* (II. vi. 10-19), in which we read of

“the all-honour'd, honest Roman,
Brutus,
With the arm'd rest, courtiers of
beauteous freedom,”

(and any possible allusion to the revolt of Essex) we find that Shakespeare is as ready as Plutarch to condemn Brutus when occasion requires. The fact is that both Shakespeare and Plutarch were imaginative writers, and gave their imagination a rightful precedence ; even Plutarch was poet and philosopher, rather than historian, and in the pages of either writer it is far easier to discover the artist than the politician.



POSTSCRIPT.

I WOULD venture to repeat here the apology which concludes my edition of *Apolonius and Silla* :—

" As a final note, it is due from me to explain that every endeavour to illustrate Shakespeare must seem laboured and misleading when looked at in parts ; even full commentaries on a whole play, were it *Troilus and Cressida* or *Measure for Measure*, might be regarded as untrustworthy or as an excess of zeal. But if we bear in mind the sterling and subtle quality of Shakespeare's work, and its vast area, we may be disposed to welcome any honest attempt whether to point the way to a clearer view of this expanse of literature, or, more important still, to fathom its depths. Say what you will, great poet includes great artist and great philosopher. The ocean is not all surface, nor is life, nor is the poetry of Shakespeare. Some advise a rapid reading of our great poet, a mere surface impression ; that may do for a novel ; it will not do for Shakespeare—unless it comes last as well as first, with an interval of patient study between. You glance at a great picture, and get your first impression ; but next, you examine the craftsmanship in detail, all that appertains to the subject—the history and treatment, conception and execution ; all mixing and manipulation of pigments, all lights and shadows, all drawings from plain outline to delicate and inmost touch, all grouping and contrast and perspective and atmosphere and other thousand devices and expedients that proclaim patient, unerring and astonishing genius ; then you look at your picture again, and your appreciation and delight are increased a hundredfold. And thus I prefer to understand with Oliver Wendell Holmes (and several others) that the riches of Shakespeare are inexhaustible ; that you must dig for them ; and that as you dig you will find ' in the lowest deep a lower deep.' "

VII

APPENDIX

SHAKESPEARE AND SEX

SINCE the foregoing pages went to press, I have read, *Mistress Davenant, the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, by Mr. A. Acheson. The book is ingenious; but as the author promises more, it will be well to suspend judgment.¹ Doubtless there is a use in tracking Shakespeare—or attempting to track him—to the inmost recesses of sexual intrigue, but on the other hand it may not be useless to put on record the nobler sentiments a poet who, whatever his personal lapses, never makes literary parade of vice,

¹ On page 100 I think the author must be in error in regard to the first of Shakespeare's two uses of the word "book" in the sonnets; in Sonnet 77 it can mean, I should say, nothing but "album," and even in 23 the expression "my books" seems largely metaphorical, and suggestive of the stage prompting book. See pp. 49, 50, above.

and has left models of morality that will not easily be surpassed. I will therefore conclude my attempt to vindicate Shakespeare as a moralist by giving a brief notice of his views on the relations of the sexes.

As it appears to me, much of our modern literature is a plea for immorality based mostly on an appeal to nature, as though to something better than human institutions, and altogether above them. Even our modern criticism of Shakespeare is by no means free from this doctrine of reversion, especially when it deals with his opinions of the sexual relations. We are told that his morality is not our morality, that he has the precedent of nature, that his lovers make their own values, have no commerce with reason,¹ and so forth.

¹ This is George Meredith's "Love is a thing of moods, Not like hard life, of laws." On the other hand we have Coleridge: "It is a passion which it is impossible for any creature to feel, but a being endowed with reason." The fallacy that the passion of love must be folly, or must end in folly, has passed into a proverb; and strangely enough, the proverb, as was mentioned in the Sixth Essay above, is quoted by the two greatest intellects of the Elizabethan era, Bacon and Shakespeare. Bacon, indeed, twice quotes it:

Therefore, in this brief Appendix, I will deal chiefly with that topic, and endeavour to set forth the real question at issue, both in regard to Shakespeare and to actual fact.

We have to distinguish, first of all, between nature and human nature. Human nature, let us say, is either moral or immoral ; nature (with or without the capital letter) is neither ; there is no morality and no immorality among a tribe of monkeys, or in the poultry yard ; but (if I may reinforce a former argument) with the advance of civilisation the words *moral* and *immoral* came into being, and laid the foundations of all ethics ; and as long as those words retain one jot of their vitality, so long we are bound to respect them. We do not at

first in French, “Un amoureux fait toujours quelque chose folâtre” (? *cho folâtre*) and then as “It is impossible to love and be wise” ; and Shakespeare repeats it in the well-known words, “To be wise and love Exceeds man’s might.” Bacon, as I have already remarked, quotes the proverb in a spirit of permanent conviction, Shakespeare conventionally, or as a passing mood. His more deliberate opinion of sexual love : “*It gives to every power a double power,*” would be found in such a passage as *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, iv. iii.

present think it "decent" to go about naked, nor to seduce our neighbours' wives nor our own daughters, nor even other helpless and innocent young girls; nor do we allow our males to fight like farmyard cocks for the indiscriminate possession of our females. Marriage is found to be a more convenient arrangement.

But marriage and our other moral institutions (if I may judge from the present trend of novels and plays and manners) may die out, and then all the foregoing cruelties and excesses will become "decent" once more; it is the day (not very far off, I believe) to which some of us look eagerly forward, the day of our return to "Nature," when Nature will again be supreme. Let us rather assume the virtue of candour (though it may be our last), and with more show of honesty and truth call it the day of our return to monkeydom and universal rapine.

But in the sixteenth century those two soul-creating and soul-sustaining words, *moral* and *immoral*, had not yet blunted the keenness of a contrast which Shakespeare,

as I have endeavoured to show, was most careful to maintain—

“ I do betray
My nobler part to my gross body's
treason.”

“ The rarer action is In virtue . . .”
Or, if I have not made this sufficiently clear, let me now add one or two illustrations in support of my contention. What are Shakespeare's convictions in regard to love and marriage? In one or two passages he exalts friendship over love, but soon denounces that doctrine wholesale. We may pardon him if at that earlier date he was sometimes hampered by convention and tradition. Nothing, perhaps, in his wonderful genius is more wonderful than the way in which he shook himself free from those trammels of the past, and created ideals of love that may last for all time. He saw, no doubt, that the loveless life of Greece and Rome, which some writers admire, was altogether unlovely, and that its friendship, clanship, citizenship, or whatever other bond, was a poor substitute for love.

Indeed, we need only compare the Greek dramatists with Shakespeare, and this all important difference between the life of the earlier and the later nations is at once apparent, not less apparent, indeed, than when we compare the demonologies of those nations.

And now, coming to particulars, Shakespeare had none of our modern irreverence of marriage ; to him marriage was to love as metre to poetry, as form to art ; it alone separated love from lust ;¹ it was at once the consummation of love, and its crown.

In the same last and supreme work, in which he creates his final and unsurpassable ideal of love, he also states² the case for marriage ;² the whole play is in praise of it, and this utterance is solemn and distinct, and ought to be better known. On unmarried love he says—

“ No sweet aspersion shall the heavens
let fall ” ; (*The Tempest*, iv. i. 18.)

¹ See Sonnet 129 for a remarkable denunciation of the “ lust of the flesh.”

² And betrothal—or courtship : “ Lest two light winning Make the prize light.”

and he continues—

“ but barren hate
Sour-eyed disdain and discord shall
bestrew
The union of your bed with weeds so
loathly
That you shall hate it both.”

Closely connected with this important subject of marriage is one that is too often passed over in silence, for it has been usual to regard pure passion as woman's offering to man, but on man's side a mere and rare accident, or even if pure, a coarse, colder, and more casual emotion. It took such a discerning moralist as Shakespeare some twenty years to learn this golden truth. He actually allows Romeo to imperil the best dramatic qualities of the tragedy by a gratuitous declaration of this trifling with love; and in spite of the persistent though gradual ascent of the poet's ideal, his women are too often the maiden moon that sparkles on a sty; there is no hint, or rather no declaration of virgin manhood until he makes his supreme effort in *The Tempest*.

Here not only does Shakespeare rigidly

cleanse the speech of Ferdinand and Miranda from the conventional impurities that are present in the love passages of most of the other plays, but he also makes Ferdinand protest eloquently to Miranda that his past was pure. This love of Ferdinand and Miranda I regard as Shakespeare's most valuable legacy to our moral and emotional life, as it was also his last achievement.

But if Ferdinand is the ideal lover on man's side, Miranda is no less the ideal lover among women, and to the former let us add another tribute that has never been paid to this greatest of moralists; from infancy Miranda had been kept unspotted from the world. This was Shakespeare's opportunity, and right nobly has he seized it—

“I do not know
One of my sex . . . nor have I seen
More that I may call men than you,
good friend,
And my dear father.”

All this was denied to Juliet, if only through the coarse garrulity of her nurse. But again, between Juliet and Miranda

Shakespeare had twenty years of practice in creating the ideal, and now that we have reached its culmination in the "wonder"¹ of *The Tempest*, we can look back and discover the meaning of the marvellous series of women who, in drama after drama, represent every phase of the mighty and moral passion of love.

Shakespeare even makes a cast into the future. He seems to share our modern opinion that love thrives best on education, provided the education is not unworthy of love, not such as will stultify it. Here again, I believe, we may climb with Shakespeare up the long ascent of love till we behold the vision of Miranda, the one highly-educated woman in all his plays; and he is careful to emphasise the fact.

I hardly think it necessary to proceed further with this subject. Unless I am greatly mistaken, these few remarks will be enough to compare Shakespeare something more than favourably with our present-day writers on the relation of the sexes.

¹ *The Tempest*, I. ii. 426.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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